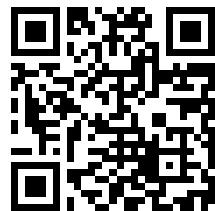

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A PRIVATE AUDIENCE.

Page 298.

Maud * Melville's Marriage



*A Story of the
Seventeenth Century*



BOVISH HOMAGE. Page 21.

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MAUD MELVILLE'S MARRIAGE

A Story of the Seventeenth Century

BY

E. EVERETT-GREEN

Author of "Winning the Victory," "Temple's Trial,"
"The Heiress of Wylmington,"
&c. &c.



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Contents.

I. TROUBLED DAYS,	9
II. MATRIMONIAL PROJECTS,	26
III. THE LITTLE BRIDE,	43
IV. DYING COUNSEL,	...	...	...	61
V. THE PLOT,	...	...	...	81
VI. OLIVER'S MISSION,	...	...	...	97
VII. A JOURNEY,	...	...	...	112
VIII. IN LONDON,	...	...	...	128
IX. THE PRISON,	...	...	...	143
X. BAD NEWS,	...	...	...	163
XI. MAUD'S RESOLUTION,	...	...	...	181
XII. FOUND,	...	...	...	199
XIII. THE PRISONER,	...	...	...	215
XIV. THE BROTHER,	...	...	...	232
XV. THE PLOT,	...	...	...	249
XVI. THE ESCAPE,	...	...	...	269
XVII. THE QUEEN,	...	...	...	290
XVIII. CONCLUSION,	...	...	...	306

INTRODUCTION.

IN turning over last year some family papers that had lain hidden away in an old-fashioned cabinet, untouched for perhaps a century, I lighted upon an incomplete autobiographical story by a remote ancestress of mine, together with a mass of memoranda and correspondence, most of it bearing upon the one episode of her life which she had evidently contemplated describing in full for the benefit of her descendants. Whether she did succeed in this task, and the blanks in the MS. be due to subsequent loss, or whether she went to work in an irregular way and never completed the story, I am unable to say. From internal evidence I am disposed to conjecture that Lady Maud Melville did not absolutely pen any of the narrative herself, but that the work was undertaken by some child or grandchild of hers, who heard the story from her lips and wrote down fragments as they were recounted, leaving blanks to be filled up

later from the memoranda and letters evidently carefully collected for the purpose.

This, however, is only a theory, and may not be correct. My task has been to master the entire contents of the papers, to make out from them a consecutive narrative, and, where it has been possible, to let the heroine tell her tale in her own words.

The incidents of her life at this time were exceedingly romantic and interesting. If the following story does not convey this impression, the fault will be mine, not that of the Lady Maud Melville.

MAUD MELVILLE'S MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER I.

TROUBLED DAYS.

THE midsummer sun of the year of grace 1680 was shining bravely in the sky, as brightly and as bravely as if no plots and plans and social and political factions were rending the peace of private families, and threatening once again to shake the basis of the throne itself. And, indeed, the quiet, peaceful aspect of the country, removed from the centres of stirring life, would give an impression that all was going smoothly and well; for news in those days travelled slowly and uncertainly, and people grew up in a placid ignorance of what was passing around, incomprehensible to us who have been brought up to the penny post, the electric telegraph, and the steam power of the nineteenth century.

Not very long ago, the metropolis had been thrown into an uproar by the infamous revelations of Titus Oates and his worthy followers, and the public mind had not yet recovered its balance from the scare produced by the so-called Popish plot. Parliament was shortly to meet, when the burning question of the Exclusion Bill was to be brought up for final settlement, and party feeling was running high, the tide of popularity setting strongly against the Court and Tory party, and in favour of the Whigs.

Whig and Tory were new nick-names just introduced at this epoch, amid many others (such as *Birminghams, Abhorriers, Tantivies*) which have since become obsolete. Long-sighted politicians, or men possessed of keen insight into the spirit of the times and the public mind, were able to foretell from the very triumph and elation of the Whig party the reaction that speedily followed; but for the present, the King and the Court party were intensely unpopular, and their opponents rode the flood-tide of popularity, which threatened for the moment to carry all before it. Tory gentlemen, especially if suspected of the smallest leaning towards Popery, stood in terror of their very lives. Any vile fabrication, plotted amid thieves and outcasts in the lanes and alleys of Whitefriars or the wards of Newgate, obtained easy credence amongst a prepossessed and violently agitated

populace. Heads had fallen before this on testimony that was shortly afterwards proved to be utterly fallacious ; and no one knew whose turn might not come next.

These were difficult and perilous times to live in, and a man's greatest safeguard was his insignificance or poverty.

Yet, as has before been hinted, despite the many anxieties of the times, life in rural districts went on as a rule very tranquilly ; for news travelled slowly, and was frequently quite untrustworthy, and often days and even weeks went by without bringing anything of a disturbing character to the ears of the inhabitants of country mansions.

Even Lord Wakefield's Priory House, situated only twelve or fourteen miles from London itself, seemed in those days to lie remote and tranquil in the midst of silvan solitude. Lord Wakefield himself visited the metropolis from time to time, going thither sometimes on horseback, sometimes in his coach-and-six, always well attended by armed servants, for fear of an attack from highwaymen ; but his wife seldom accompanied him, being a lady of quiet tastes and habits, who preferred the sanctuary of her own home and the society of her children to any attractions the city had to offer ; and of his five children, only his eldest son, Viscount Cottingham, had so far accom-

panied him on these journeys. At this time the Viscount was a fine young fellow of eighteen, more polished in manners and address than most country-bred youths of that period, and very full of the iniquities of the Court party and the enormities of Tories in general. His father, who had lived through many startling revolutions of public opinion and sentiment, often warned him to be more cautious and discreet in his language and bearing; but the young man, who was hot-headed and enthusiastic, heeded these warnings but little, having inherited the instincts of his parents, without the tolerant charity of his mother or the cautious sagacity of his father. However, he was but a youth, and his parents hoped that greater coolness and wisdom would come with advancing years.

Lord Wakefield's ancestors had been of plebeian origin, and had bought their peerage in the days of James I. The present Lord Wakefield was only the second earl; and his father, who had but lately risen from the ranks, had embraced the popular side in the days of the Civil War. He himself had fought under Cromwell in the battles against the Royalist troops; and the Priory House and lands had been bought with the money which had been bestowed upon him as a reward for faithful service.

Lord Wakefield was, however, of that cool, cautious

temperament that looks ever ahead, and does not forget that change is the order of the day in this uncertain world of ours. Although perfectly faithful to the cause he had embraced, he was never a violent partisan, and always threw his influence on the side of moderation and tolerance. The military despotism that had succeeded the re-establishment of popular rights had been regarded by him with deep disapproval; and it was without any absolute insincerity that he had welcomed the restoration of Charles II. His calm loyalty had stood him in good stead. There had been no attempt to wrest from him the broad acres so lately acquired; he, like the majority of his compeers, was included in the general indemnity, and when he presented himself at Court, he was graciously received by the sovereign.

Lord Wakefield had married, at the age of thirty, a fair Puritan maiden, by name Mistress Phœbe Fells, who, though not of high title or rank, had charmed him by her tranquil beauty and by the virtues and graces of her mind. She had married him for love, and the rank and affluence to which she had been raised had no charms for her. Stanch to the principles in which she had been reared, she could not be persuaded to accompany her husband to Court, but remained ever at home, tending her children, visiting the sick and poor around her, and ordering her house-

hold in the strict, gentle, and godly fashion in which she had herself been trained. There was nothing of the harsh, bigoted, intolerant Puritan about Lady Wakefield. Her own goodness of heart and gentle tenderness of disposition (decidedly in advance of the times she lived in) gave her a nameless charm that won all hearts. Her children adored, her servants respected her. The Priory House was in her time a very happy home, and the family of the Earl seemed blessed by prosperity without and peace and goodwill within. In times like these such immunity alike from political anxiety and from domestic strife was a boon highly to be valued. Lord Wakefield, not without reason, counted himself a happy man, and his friends endorsed that sentiment.

Prosperity did not, however, harden his heart. He was and ever had been a faithful friend and a man of considerable benevolence; and in no way had he shown this favourable side of his character in a better light than in his treatment of his old friend and comrade, Sir Charles Melville.

This Sir Charles was not related (so far as I can ascertain) to George Lord Melville who was accused of treason after the Rye House Plot, convicted during his absence abroad, and only restored to favour in the reign of William III. Sir Charles came of an old family long settled in England. His father was

a baronet of James the First's creation. He might have had a peerage, but having come of a race of knights and gentlemen, he preferred to be known, as so many of his forefathers had been, as Sir Charles Melville of the Manors of Hartsbourne, Marcols, and Slackdeacons.

Sir Charles and the present Lord Wakefield (then Viscount Cottingham) were at school and college together, and a warm friendship existed between them. When the Civil War broke out, and they espoused different sides (for the Melvilles were always red-hot Royalists), the personal friendship was not smothered in party faction or political differences. Though they had met face to face in hostile armies, they had felt as friends rather than as foes; and the friendship that can stand a test as severe as that, is worthy to be called by that often misused term.

The close of the war found Viscount Cottingham Lord Wakefield, owing to the death of his father from wounds received at Marston Moor; and the son reaped the reward of their double loyalty to the popular cause in the grant of money which had enabled him to purchase the Priory lands, taken from a "malignant" who had sought safety in exile when his cause became desperate.

One of Lord Wakefield's main reasons for casting longing glances upon that particular property was its

close proximity to the estate of his friend Sir Charles Melville. The Lord of the Manors before-named was a near neighbour to the owner of the Priory; and Lord Wakefield was desirous to be near his friend, to stand between him and the severity of the successful Puritans, who would certainly make him pay dearly now for his loyalty to the crown. It was mainly due to his kindly and courageous intervention that his friend was left in possession of his ancestral estate, on condition of paying a fine that almost reduced him to bankruptcy. But the fine was paid in due course, and the estate, though impoverished, was beginning to recover itself, when the era of the Restoration brought better days to the old cavalier; and he now had the satisfaction of repaying in some measure the kindness of his friend in past days.

True, Lord Wakefield's peril was nothing like what his own had been, for the Earl's conduct had been more temperate throughout; and Charles II. had little idea of stirring up strife by harsh treatment of his smaller foes. Still there was a coldness in the higher circles towards those who had taken arms against the late King; and it was undoubtedly due to the influence and favourable representations of Sir Charles Melville that the Earl had been so favourably received at Court. The friendship had thus been cemented by mutual gratitude, and it had stood the test of

time and trial without waning or fading on either side.

For nearly twenty years life had been flowing very calmly and smoothly for both these old comrades and friends. Lord Wakefield was now a man of some fifty-six summers, and Sir Charles was but a year or two older. His appearance, however, would lead the spectator to judge him to be many years the senior of his companion; for his face was seamed with wrinkles, his figure bowed slightly as if with age or infirmity, whilst Lord Wakefield's carriage was upright and alert, his figure vigorous and athletic, his eye as keen and far-seeing as in the days of his youth. As a matter of fact, Sir Charles's health was much undermined by some undefined malady, whose nature was little understood in those days of rudimentary science. He was a widower with one son, Rupert, a fine handsome lad of nearly fourteen summers. Anxiety for the future of this lad in these difficult and dangerous times preyed upon the father's mind a good deal, and was often a subject of conversation between him and his good friend Lord Wakefield.

The two men were slowly pacing the wide terrace walk that lay before the south front of the old Priory House. A spacious arbour of clipped yew bordered it at either end, and yew trees, clipped to the shape of fox or peacock, alternated with large

stone vases at intervals of some twenty yards all along the walk. In the centre was a flight of stone steps leading down to the lawn and garden beneath, and beyond that lay the wide expanse of well-timbered park.

It would be a stretch of the real truth to assert that the lawns were like velvet, the gardens a blaze of flowers, and the paths free from weeds, and edged with the precision of a modern well-kept garden. In those days things were on a rougher scale. Farther away, in the north or west of England, there was little idea of ornamentation about a garden. Vegetables and small fruit flourished beneath the windows of the reception rooms, and sheep and horses grazed peacefully on many lawns.

Lord Wakefield's house, however, was near enough to the centre of civilization and fashion to own a garden that was a garden and not a wilderness ; and to eyes accustomed to the neglect of many such places it looked very trim and bright, creditable alike to gardener and owner. The elastic verdure of the turf, and the fine growth of beech and oak, gave the place a beauty and character of its own that nothing could destroy ; and the graceful grouping of some half-dozen children upon the grass at play would have made attractive a less well-favoured spot.

One of this group—none other, in fact, than the

young Viscount Cottingham—could no longer indeed be ranked as a child. He was a fine young spark of eighteen summers, wore a wig, like a grown man, and a dress that he was not ashamed of at Whitehall itself. He carried a sword, too, and managed it not ungracefully ; and though he was walking about upon the lawn with his great hound at his heels, he took small part in the diversions of his younger companions. He thought himself as far removed from them in age as he certainly was in character and temperament. The second son, Oliver, lay under a tree, with a book on the ground before him. Studious boys were in those days more the exception than in the time preceding and the time following this particular period. The Civil War was perhaps the cause of the indifference to education and literature that prevailed at this juncture ; but whatever the cause, the fact undoubtedly remained that book-learning was decidedly at a discount, and Oliver's studious habits were thought remarkable, and seemed to promise him a brilliant future—at least such was the fond hope of his parents.

The three youngest of Lord Wakefield's children were girls, the eldest of whom, the Lady Maud, was a strikingly handsome child of ten summers, tall, and well grown, with lustrous dark eyes, short curly hair, and features exquisitely moulded and full of vivacity

and animation. Plainly she was the leading spirit in the games that day. Her little sisters appeared rather as faithful satellites than as separate individualities; and their boy-playfellow, Rupert Melville, paid open homage to the little queen of the revels. There was something picturesque and charming in the contrast presented by the courtly air and parti-coloured raiment of the boy, his loosely curling hair and bright open face, and the far plainer attire of the little girl as she dispensed or withheld her favours. She was dressed in accordance with her mother's taste, in a plainer and more quiet fashion than was usual in the houses of the nobility, and the short curls clustering round the shapely head offered a marked contrast to Rupert's love-locks and the heavy wigs of the men of that period. But Lady Wakefield exercised her own taste in matters where her girls were concerned; and whilst they were still young, her husband never interfered.

Presently the game, whatever it was, seemed to come to a conclusion, and the children, flushed and warm with their exertions, ceased their gambols in the sunshine. Rupert gave his hand to little Lady Maud, and led her to a mossy bank amid the roots of a noble oak tree; and when she had seated herself, he threw himself upon the ground at her feet in an attitude of boyish homage. She, on her part,

plucked a few wild flowers, and, after a show of wilfulness or coyness, held them out to him. The little drama enacted so unconsciously before their eyes attracted the attention of both the fathers, who were still pacing the terrace in earnest converse. They paused to watch the gestures of the youthful pair, although they were far too distant from them to hear a word of the talk passing between them.

“By my troth, Charles, it looks as if the young ones were playing our game to some good purpose.”

A smile, half of pleasure, half of sadness, crossed the baronet’s face.

“Your little maid would win a heart more hard to be touched than Rupert’s; but she is bare ten years old, alas! and long before she comes to years of discretion may have turned her eyes another way. Suitors will never be lacking to the fair children of Lord Wakefield.”

The father looked round with a smile of pride upon the group on the grass below. In truth, any father might have been pardoned for experiencing a glow of complaisant satisfaction in the contemplation of so many well-grown olive-branches.

“Belike you speak the truth there, Charles, provided some turn of fortune’s wheel does not carry me downwards towards destruction, ere my children come to those so-called years of discretion. And yet

Rupert has ever been the most devoted of cavaliers to my little maid, and she calls him openly her 'sweet-heart,' albeit her mother likes not well such play as that, nor such light talk of what she deems so sacred. Yet, as I say to her oft, to whom better could we give our child than to the son of our best and oldest friend? And why should not the children begin young? The child is father to the man. She shakes her head at that; yet, in sooth, she cannot but smile, for Rupert is almost as a son to her, and she loves him only second best to her own children."

"Ay, marry does she," answered Sir Charles. "Poor motherless lad! She has ever filled the mother's place in his heart. Small wonder that he loves her and hers with all the warmth of a loving nature. His boyhood would have been but dreary had it not been for you and yours."

"Why, as for that, Charles, Rupert has brought as much pleasure as he has received. My little daughters are ever lamenting that he is not their real brother; for Cottingham is too much the fine gentleman and Oliver too much the student to be playfellows to them. I tell my little Maud that the day will come when she will cease to wish that Rupert were her brother."

"I would it might be so," answered the baronet with his sad smile. "I would the future of my boy

were as well assured as a connection with your house would make it."

"In good sooth, Charles, you are needlessly depressed by the passing wave of ill feeling towards your party. Surely in the days of good King Charles it is a strange thing to hear his father's old supporter talk in so doleful a strain. Depend upon it, the cloud will roll away, and all danger quickly pass. Like enough, ere long we shall see the tide turn, and another of those strange reactions set in which will, in its turn, make me tremble for my safety, as you tremble now for yours. These are strange times, Charles, and the aspect of the future is uncertain. Methinks it would be no bad policy on either side to unite our families by a bond too strong to be broken. The influence of a kinsman will do more than the intercession of a mere friend. In unity is strength. The union of our two houses has ever been in my thoughts. It is a subject that has many times been named between us two."

"Ay, that is so. I wish it yet more than you can do; for I feel that my life is not like to be prolonged many years, and I would fain leave my boy to the guardianship of kinsmen of his own. But they are mere children still."

"What of that? None too young to wed, as things go in these days. Why, we have brides of five

years old, who scarce can say the words they are bidden by the priest. My little Maud would gladly take a part in any ceremony where she would be the queen; and if you ask her is she willing to be Rupert's wife, you would not find her backward in assent."

Sir Charles smiled slightly, yet the smile was tinged with sadness; and he shook his head as he made answer,—

"Methinks, Wakefield, that such a marriage would be little to the liking of your wife. She would not wish a child of hers to take so solemn a vow whilst yet too young to understand its import. The little maid loves Rupert well, it is true, but she is of too tender years to pledge herself for life."

Lord Wakefield's face was full of thought; he turned the objection over in his mind.

"There is truth in what you say: Lady Wakefield has thoughts and scruples little in accord with the spirit of the times, and I care not to cross her more than need be. Yet she ever submits to my wishes if I speak with authority and decision, and it may be in this case it would be wise to do so."

"Nay, Wakefield; I would not you did this, and on behalf of me and mine. As things stand at this juncture, the gain of the alliance would all be on my side, and it would grieve me that it should be done in

defiance of the wishes of one whom I sincerely respect and love. It would ill requite her goodness to my boy, to bestow upon him the hand of her child against the mother's will. Let us wait awhile and see how matters go with us. I would not that the advantage of the alliance should be all on our side."

"That will not long be the case," answered Lord Wakefield; "we have passed through too many changes not to live in expectation of more. I will speak to my wife upon the subject, and see how she would approve the thought of mating the children thus young. I am well convinced myself, and long have been, that such a union would be to the advantage of both houses."

"If Lady Wakefield gives consent, I myself should rejoice in the alliance; but I could not wish it to be made without her goodwill and approbation."

And there for the present the matter dropped.

CHAPTER II.

MATRIMONIAL PROJECTS.

IN the times of which we write the marriages of mere children were by no means uncommon. Boys and girls of tender years were often thus mated by their parents, from motives of policy or friendship; after which the bride returned to her nursery and the bridegroom to his school or school-room, and in those days of difficult travelling it was often years before the youthful pair so much as saw one another again. When circumstances permitted, and the children had grown up to early manhood and womanhood, the bride left her father's house for that of her husband. Sometimes there was a second ceremony as a sort of sequel to the first, although there was no moral or legal necessity for it. Sometimes, on the other hand, in these stormy, troublous times, political faction and party strife drove the young couple far apart, and they lost sight of one another, never to

meet again. It was easy, in those days of lax morality, to get these marriages annulled, if the contracting parties wished it; and indeed they were often annulled without reference to the young people themselves, if the relatives of one or the other could obtain sufficient influence in high quarters to cancel the marriage. It was no wonder, then, that a woman of Lady Wakefield's opinions and training looked with disfavour upon marriages such as these; and when her husband sounded her upon the desirability of mating young Rupert with their daughter Maud, she spoke strongly against any such step.

It was not a lack of affection for Rupert that dictated this refusal. She loved the lad almost as a son, and would gladly have welcomed him as such in very deed, had he been of an age to take upon himself the solemn vows of wedlock. Had he and Maud been six or seven years older, she would have been the last to oppose the marriage; for as boy and girl they loved each other well, and there was great likelihood that such affection would develop with the flight of time into something of the true nature of a wedded love. But the mother could not bring her mind to permit her child to take vows the meaning of which she could not fairly understand, or bind herself before she could learn what it really meant to link her lot with that of another.

For the time, therefore, the plan dropped. There did not seem any immediate hurry. Sir Charles Melville, in all things chivalrous and sensitive, shrank from urging on a step which, just at this juncture, appeared more to his advantage than that of his friend; whilst Lord Wakefield, though desiring the alliance—distrusting the present security of his lot—could not bring his mind to press forward any scheme against which his wife had set her mind. He loved her, and he respected her deeply, and he had resolved never to oppose her needlessly. He spoke out plainly as to his own wishes, but for the present he was content to waive them in favour of hers.

Lady Wakefield, on her side, knowing well the temperament of her husband, his caution, foresight, and desire to stand well with all men, and swim, as far as possible, with the tide, felt very certain that should the day come when this marriage appeared very politic for the strengthening of his own position, no considerations which she could urge would be able to hinder its taking place. She was able herself to see that it was an alliance that might be advantageous to them, and she knew also that the matter was often in his thoughts. She was a good wife, a tender mother, and a far-seeing woman; and she was very well convinced that she might ere long be called upon to submit in this thing to the will of the husband

she had vowed to love, honour, and obey. She never allowed herself to oppose him beyond a certain point. Her influence was great, but it had its limits ; and when those limits were reached, she never attempted to overstep them. She trained her children to look up to their father, and treat his word as law, and never in their hearing did she breathe a word that savoured of opposition.

So now when she realized that the eldest of her little trio of daughters might be called upon, whilst yet a child, to take upon herself the sacred marriage vows, she resolved that if she could not stand between her and this threatened danger (for as such she regarded it), she would at least endeavour, as far as possible, to prepare her mind for the change in store for her, by teaching her something of the nature of the vows she might one day be called upon to pronounce, and by making her fully understand the sacred and binding character of the marriage contract.

Maud was a peculiarly bright and intelligent child. Moreover, she was not so ignorant as her mother would fain have kept her of the ways of the gay world without the walls of her quiet home. Her brother, Lord Cottingham, was fond of posing as a great man, and would entertain his sisters sometimes, for want of a better audience, with the story of his

gay sayings and doings ; so from him she had acquired a good deal of vague information calculated to enlarge the limited range of her mental vision, and he did not hesitate to name openly to her subjects that her mother would fain have kept from her knowledge for many years to come.

The freemasonry existing between brothers and sisters of even very different ages makes anything like secrets between them difficult. Cottingham knew well that a marriage was proposed between his sister and Rupert Melville. He had many times heard the matter discussed, or at least alluded to by his father and his father's old friend, Lord Halifax, at whose house they often stayed when in town.

Lord Halifax, the celebrated head of the "Trimmers" (who was not ashamed to be called a Trimmer, and gave some very excellent reasons why the conduct of the Trimmers should be extolled and imitated), was an old friend of Lord Wakefield's, and one of his closest political allies. He took Lord Halifax's advice on every important step, and always consulted with him before any undertaking that could by possibility be construed as bearing a political aspect. He had known Halifax in the days when he was plain Sir George Saville ; had seen him made first a Viscount, then an Earl, and indeed later on lived to see him a Marquis too. At present, however, he had not attained

this last distinction, though treading warily the difficult path that was to lead him to that goal.

Cottingham had a great admiration for his father, but this admiration did not extend to his father's friends. The young man was rash and hot-headed, and in no way disposed to trim. At the present moment there was nothing to be feared from the most open statement of his views, and he had enjoyed swaggering about and talking with violence and rancour against Papists and Tories alike. He and Rupert had many times been within an ace of a violent quarrel; and the idea of a marriage between his sister and a "scion of the house of Melville" was entirely and utterly distasteful to him.

Being a youth of more zeal than discretion, he did all he could to raise in Maud's mind a dislike for her comrade and playfellow, by speaking against him on every possible occasion. Of course this line of action was well calculated to defeat its own object. Maud, who had all her life long been fond of Rupert, resented hotly any aspersions cast upon him or upon his father. He had talked to her so much of his cavalier ancestors, and their sayings and doings, that she had become thoroughly imbued with the romance of the early days of the century, and despite her training and hereditary instincts, was at heart a thorough little Royalist. She had heard stories of

the military despotism of Cromwell that seemed quite as bad as any of the illegal acts of the murdered King, and she could not understand how the people who would not submit to the one, lauded and defended the author of the other. She had always declared that if *she* had lived in the days of the Civil War, and had been a man, she would have fought side by side with Rupert in the ranks of the Royalists. She thought the Cavaliers much more interesting and romantic than the Roundheads; and as for the justice of the respective causes, she could not see that there was much to choose between them.

So when Cottingham, in his swaggering, bullying fashion, got up quarrels with Rupert, or railed at him behind his back, the child's anger flamed up hotly, and she stood up for her friend and playfellow in a fashion that showed well the mettle of which *she* was made.

When the elder brother found that little was to be gained by such offensive tactics, he changed his front somewhat; but even so, he did not gain much satisfaction for the cause he had in hand.

When it first dawned upon Maud that there was some thought of marrying her to Rupert, it all seemed natural and right enough. They had played a hundred times at being husband and wife, and girls of Maud's eager and precocious temperament seldom feel

so young as they appear to others to be. She thought it quite natural to look upon herself as Rupert's future wife, and could not imagine why her brother should speak in slighting and contemptuous terms of one so closely connected with them. She fired up like a little sky-rocket whenever he dared to speak ill of Rupert before her; and slowly, yet surely, this determined championship of one really dear to her, gave her a sense of oneness with him and his fate that was to lead to results little dreamed of at the present crisis.

So far the disputes and differences between the children did not reach the ears of the parents. Lord and Lady Wakefield, though each in their way deeply solicitous for the welfare and happiness of their sons and daughters, did not encourage them in the unrestrained familiarity that is the growth of modern days. In presence of their parents the young people preserved a decorous gravity and silence, seldom speaking unless spoken to, and never indulging in the too loud babble of talk amongst themselves, with its attendant differences and squabbles, that one hears so often from children in the present day.

Yet Maud was a great deal with her mother, and her love for that parent amounted almost to adoration. Lady Wakefield did not romp, or laugh, or chatter with her children. She was generally grave,

and rather silent ; when they committed faults, she spoke very seriously, and punished somewhat severely ; when they were good, she seldom praised, but a gentle smile of approbation would set Maud's heart bounding with delight. Her words were always few, but they exercised a powerful influence upon those who came into contact with her, and upon no one did her precept and example make a deeper impression than upon her eldest girl.

After the interview with her husband, in which she had learned his wishes respecting Maud, and the conviction which speedily followed that a marriage between the children might at any time be insisted on, Lady Wakefield set herself to prepare for such a contingency in the best way open to her, and from that time Maud became her mother's constant companion.

The child did not all at once guess the reason for this change in her daily routine, but she enjoyed it heartily. Her mind was developing with great rapidity, and she much preferred a talk with her mother to a romp with her little sisters. She was eager, too, to learn all that her mother was ready to teach ; and whilst she sat at her feet in the sunny south parlour, plying her needle, or walked beside her on those errands of mercy for which Lady Wakefield was renowned in her parish and neighbourhood, the mother was instilling into the heart of her little daughter

lessons of love and charity and fidelity, which were destined never to be forgotten.

“ My child,” the Countess would sometimes say, after they had visited some poor homes, and alleviated the distress of the sick or oppressed, “ I would have thee ever remember, whatever may be thy lot in life, that it need never be empty or sorrowful, so long as there is sickness and suffering to be relieved. It may be thy lot to be prosperous and happy—if so, give God thanks, and show thy gratitude by sharing thy prosperity with thy less favoured brethren. Yet if, my child, adversity or sorrow should fall upon thee, do not lose heart, or think that thy life is lived in vain. It will never be so if thou accept it as the gift of Him who dwells on high; and if thou wilt live it to His glory, all will be well with thee, both in this world and in the world to come.”

And when Maud heard words like these, she would look up with big innocent eyes, and say,—

“ But, mother dear, why should I ever be unhappy? I am always happy now.”

“ My child, I trust and pray that a happy life may still be thine; but we know not what the future may bring forth. We live in difficult, perilous times. I would that thou shouldest have the secret of true happiness in thyself.”

Then Maud would ask eagerly,—

“What is the secret, mother dear?”

“The fear of the Lord in thy heart, my child, and the fulfilment of His commandments in thy life. ‘Tis He who bids us love our neighbour as ourselves, and care for those around us as we do for one another.”

“That is what you do, mother.”

“I do, my child, what little I can; and I would have thee do better. Family cares absorb much of my leisure, and there may come a time when they will absorb thine too. But life is full of uncertainties. The ties that bind me may not bind thee. It may be thy lot to live in greater loneliness. But my little daughter need never forget that acts of love and charity sweeten the loneliest of lives, and that there is One who has said about such acts, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.’”

“That was about feeding people when they were hungry, and giving them clothes, and visiting them when they were sick or in prison. You do all that, mother dear, except going to people in prison. I think I should like to see what a prison is like. If I grow up, and live in a place where there is one, I should like to be kind to the prisoners, and go and see them. I wonder if I could get in.”

And the mother would smile at the eager way in which the child took up a new idea, but was well

pleased that she should enter into the idea of gaining happiness herself through the happiness of others.

An early indication of Maud's sincerity in her wish to follow her mother's footsteps was her willingness to make a personal sacrifice for the sake of the poor.

One day she came running to her mother with flushed cheeks and eyes ablaze with indignation and pity. In her hand she held a little ebony box with a slit in the lid and a silver lock. It was one of her few childish treasures, and was used by her as a money-box. She had been saving up for some while such coins as came from time to time into her possession, in order to purchase for herself some of the plays of Shakespeare, for which she had a great admiration, fostered by Oliver, who would get her to enact with him his favourite scenes. Now, however, all was forgotten in the pity and anger of the present moment.

“Mother! mother! mother dear!” she panted out, forgetting decorum in her excitement, and rushing up to Lady Wakefield like an animated whirlwind, “please, mother dear, will you open my box and let me have my money? Nurse Gowrie and I were out walking over by Harrow Weald Common, and we passed by those poor little cottages against the big oak trees in the lane, and some horrid men had come for the hearth money; and the man was ill with a broken leg, and hadn’t got it, and they were going to take his bed

away, and the chair and table too ; and all the children were crying, and the poor woman stood by the bed, as if she would fight the men—and oh, she looked so miserable ! And I made Nurse Gowrie go in and ask about it, and the men only want a shilling or two, and they promised to wait two hours without taking the things, and I said they should have the money, and I ran nearly all the way home ; and please, mother dear, do open my box for me and let me have it, for I could never sleep in my bed to-night if I thought the poor man with the leg was lying on the floor, with the children all crying.”

Maud was forced to pause there, from sheer lack of breath ; but she saw that her petition was answered by the way her mother looked for the little silver key amid her ponderous household bunch, and soon had the satisfaction of feeling the money safe in her hand.

The chimney tax, or hearth money, was one of the imposts that pressed most heavily upon the poor of those days. Being a farmed tax, it was always ruthlessly exacted, and it involved the domiciliary visits so repugnant to the instinct of the free-born British subject. If the money were not forthcoming, goods and chattels were carried off without mercy ; and as the tax was disproportionately heavy on the poor as compared with the rich, it was hated and

groaned at as one of the crying evils of the day. Several poets of the time have written couplets and ballads on the subject, of which the following is a fair specimen,—

“ The good old dames, whenever they the chimney man espied,
Unto their nooks they haste away, their pots and pans to hide;
There is not one old dame in ten, and search the nation through,
But if you talk of chimney men, will spare a curse or two.”

Under such circumstances Lady Wakefield had no hesitation in granting her little daughter's petition, and Maud ran off with her money, happy and radiant, coming back an hour later, full of delight at having despatched the “nasty, horrid men,” and secured to the injured man the undisturbed possession of his bed.

A beginning once made, Maud did not content herself with one family of *protégés*, and her mother allowed her to spend her money and her time in working for and visiting the sick and needy, glad that she should have such distractions to absorb her thoughts, and keep them from dwelling too much upon herself and her own future.

For as months rolled by in quick succession, it became plain to the experienced eye of a statesman that a strong Tory reaction was in all probability to follow the Whig triumph of 1680. Lord Wakefield, ever alert and watchful, and more alive than many in that day to the signs of the times, began to feel increasing

anxiety as to the future of himself and his family—an anxiety increased by the hot-headed indiscretion of his son. The marriage, therefore, of his eldest daughter with the only son and heir of Sir Charles Melville became a matter of no little moment to him, and early in the year 1682 it was spoken of almost openly.

Unknown to her parents, Maud had heard long ago something of the proposed scheme, and thought it all very right and natural; for had she not promised to be Rupert's wife almost as soon as she could talk at all? She knew her mother had not been married till she was quite grown up; but then she had also heard of other little girls who had been made little wives as early as seven or eight. She had told Rupert she would marry him as soon as ever "mother would let her," and she was not surprised that it was to be pretty soon. It would involve no removal from home for many years to come. All would be just as it was before, save that she would be Lady Maud Melville instead of Lady Maud Lifford, and she thought it would be quite nice to be different from her sisters, and to belong in a fashion to Rupert, of whom she was so very fond.

She indulged in many brilliant day-dreams about the future that awaited them when they were grown up. She meant to be a model wife, such a wife as her mother. She did not know the dangers that so

often beset the after-lives of those who, married in childhood, were sometimes so entirely separated that there seemed no way of bridging over the dividing chasm; but she did understand that a wife's first duty was absolute fidelity to her husband, and the teaching carefully and gradually bestowed upon her during the past two years had been understood more fully than the mother had known. The seed had not fallen upon barren ground.

If Maud was not of an age to enter fully into the meaning of all she would vow when she stood at the altar with Rupert, at least it was sufficiently plain to her that she must love him with her whole heart, be faithful to him, even though some years of separation should ensue, and never, never dream of caring in that way for another, notwithstanding the possibility that her young husband might grow to be something of a stranger to her.

For Sir Charles Melville's failing health was causing considerable anxiety to his friends, and an eminent medical man, whom he had consulted, had strongly advised a residence in the south of France, or even in Italy, as the best means of prolonging his life, and possibly even of restoring him to some measure of health and strength.

A Continental journey was no small matter in those days, and a prolonged absence from England might

prove a serious hindrance to Lord Wakefield's cherished project. Sir Charles was eager for the marriage. It was probable that he might never see his native land again, and he was anxious to provide for the future of his son, and secure to him the guardianship of one he could thoroughly trust. And whom could he better trust than his old friend?—and doubly so if he should stand to his boy in the relation of father-in-law. Moreover, if the families were united by marriage, it would be easier to leave his property to the management of Lord Wakefield; for it would be settled upon Maud in the event of Rupert's death, and he would have every motive for guarding it as his own.

But for Lady Wakefield's reluctance, the marriage rite would have been performed promptly; but she opposed it, though still always admitting she would yield the point if her husband's mind were absolutely made up. All she resolutely stipulated for was that Maud should remain at home till she was seventeen or eighteen, and not leave the shelter of her parents' roof at the premature age at which some little brides were hurried away.

This point was conceded, and the wedding was talked of as a settled thing. Still there was no immediate pressure of circumstances to drive it on, till the country was convulsed in the sunny summer-tide by the startling news of the Rye House Plot.

CHAPTER III.

THE LITTLE BRIDE.

Autobiographical fragment written by Lady Maud Melville.

I OFTEN think of those bright sunny days preceding my childhood's marriage—the marriage that was the first chapter of such a curious story. I think I had always loved Rupert from the days of my babyhood. He always seemed to belong in an especial fashion to me, and one of his very first names for me was his little sweetheart. In our games we used to pretend he was my true knight or noble husband, and quite our favourite play was that our kinsfolk tried to separate us, but that we remained ever faithful to one another, in spite of everything they could say or do. It seemed almost as if we had some presentiment of what was coming upon us, only that I am sure we had not really, for the friendship between ourselves and the Melvilles was so close and warm that it was impossible to imagine that any hostility or coldness could by any possibility arise between the families.

Cottingham was the only exception. He did not like Rupert. I think he was half jealous of him, though I cannot imagine why; and then Cottingham professed to be a very stanch Whig (he was delighted when the names Whig and Tory came up, for he thought it sounded fine and fashionable to use them, and they were convenient terms expressing a good deal shortly and concisely), whilst the Melvilles were an old Royalist family, with all the instinctive traditions of loyalty to King and Church and the powers that be. They clung to much that was good, and (it must in fairness be admitted) to a good deal that was bad too, rather than witness any changes or innovations. Rupert was as hot and vehement in his Toryism as was Cottingham upon the other side, and disputes were frequent and violent. But when one is young, it seems a trifling thing for one's elder brother to be overbearing and tyrannical. It never occurred to me that any serious results could come from the quarrels of two big boys. And I do not think father and mother ever heard them, for we knew they would be vexed at high words and unkind taunts, and we did not wish to get ourselves and one another into trouble.

I can hardly remember when I first began to understand that my parents really thought of marrying me to Rupert whilst we were still children, which

was no very uncommon practice in those days. It was Cottingham's anger and vexation, I think, that first made me understand; and afterwards I fancied it was really going to happen, because mother sometimes spoke so seriously to me about the duties of married people to each other. I did not always quite understand, but I used to think that she must mean something particular when she spoke so seriously; and soon I began to wonder if she ever thought about Rupert and me, and that made me think more gravely perhaps than most children would be likely to do of the duties and responsibilities of life.

I had a feeling that mother was often anxious about me and my future. She talked to me in a different fashion from that in which she spoke to Phœbe and Bessie. She made me often very proud and pleased by the confidence she seemed to repose in me, and by the pleasure she appeared to take in my company; but again there were moments when I quitted my mother's presence feeling somewhat sad. She would convey to me, in a way that I cannot quite explain, the idea that there was something sad and perilous in life, and that one must not expect one's future to be all sunshine and happiness. When we are young, we look forward to happiness as to a sort of natural right. I did not like to think that the time might come when I should be unhappy and sad

and weighed down by care. My high spirits made me feel assured that I should always rise superior to circumstances.

I hardly know when it was that I was definitely told I was to marry Rupert whilst we were still children, but the consciousness that the vaguely- meditated plan was taking shape forced itself upon me quite early in the spring of the year 1682 (the year in which I was married); and as I knew little enough of the political troubles surging around us, I thought it was a curious time to choose, because Rupert was going to be taken from England quite soon.

Sir Charles Melville had hitherto always been our near neighbour, and Rupert had grown up almost like our brother; but now I began to understand that the doctors had warned the father not to spend another winter in England, but to go away in the autumn, and take up his residence in some warmer country. Of course, if he went, Rupert would go too; and I cried bitterly when it first dawned upon me that I was to lose my champion and sweetheart, for such Rupert had ever been to me. He found me crying once, and set himself to console me, whispering in my ear the news that he thought he was to make me his little wife before he went away.

I was half pleased, half shy, at hearing this. I

liked to think of belonging in a fashion to Rupert, and to picture his coming back to claim me when he had grown to be a fine dashing cavalier, like the ancestor Rupert in the picture-gallery at his home. But then again it seemed to me a strange thing to marry him just when he was going away for an indefinite time, and it was he who explained to me something of the reason.

It seemed that the whole nation was divided into parties and hostile camps just then. A year back it was the Whigs (to which party my father belonged) who were in the ascendant, and the King and Court and the Tory gentlemen like Sir Charles Melville, were anxious and alarmed, and some were in great danger. Now, however, a change had taken place. It had been discovered that some of the charges made against public and private men had been gross fabrications. Public opinion veered round, a violent reaction set in, and the Whigs were now in as great danger as the Tories had been a little while back. Plots, it was said, were every day being discovered, some of them aimed even at the life of the King himself. It was now as easy for false witnesses to compass the death of one set of men as it had been a year back to do the same by the others. When the testimony of these vile informers, the scum and off-scouring of the land, was taken as gospel truth and

acted upon without mercy, no man could feel himself safe ; and although my father had always been moderate in his views, and had successfully steered his bark so far through very troubled waters, yet he was often very anxious in those days, made more so from the violence with which Cottingham stated his views upon all subjects, and the known leaning of one another towards the teaching and the preaching of the Covenanters.

It was when things were looking rather dark for us, and proportionately bright for Sir Charles and Rupert, that he urged upon my father the advisability of marrying me to his son without further delay : an alliance like this might be of value to the family ; and in past days my father had rendered good service to Sir Charles, which the latter was anxious to repay.

I can well remember the wave of terror and excitement that swept over the country in the bright summer-tide when the news was brought to us of the discovery of the great Whig conspiracy, and of that lesser but most infamous plot in connection with it called the Rye House Plot. The one was to bring about a general rising of the Whigs all over the country ; the other was to compass the death of the King and the Duke of York, the next in succession to the throne.

Needless to say, my upright, cautious father had

no hand in any rash and infamous conspiracy of a like kind; but when such heads as those of Lord William Russell and Algernon Sidney had fallen beneath the headsman's axe, nobody could feel any safeguard in innocence, or any faith in the administration of the law. It seemed the duty of every man to strengthen his position by all the means in his power, and my father was glad to be able at such a juncture to ally his own house with that of such staunch loyalists as the Melvilles. The marriage between Rupert Melville and Maud Lifford was definitely decided upon, and fixed to take place on an early day in September.

Another cause of satisfaction to my father was the way in which my Lord Halifax, his old comrade and friend, managed to keep in favour through all these changes and perils. Only a fortnight before the wedding, he was raised to the rank of Marquis and Lord Privy Seal; and when my father posted up to town to congratulate him upon his new dignity, he received in return a promise to grace with his presence the ceremony that was being hurried forward apace.

I was, I will not deny, a good deal elated and excited at the prospect of the important part I was to play upon the appointed day. I was delighted that my father insisted upon a good deal of magnifi-

cence in my attire and that of my little sisters, who were to attend me, and that mother's wish that all should be very simple and quiet did not carry the day.

Of course I did not hear any of the arguments upon the subject, but I picked up a scrap of information here and there, and I gained a distinct impression that my mother did not like the marriage, and would fain have stopped it if she could; and this knowledge troubled me not a little, as I ever regarded my mother as an oracle of goodness and wisdom.

As time passed by, and the very day approached which was to see me married, the disquietude caused by the fear of my mother's disapproval grew so strongly upon me as quite to drown all sense of pleasure in the grandeur of the little social drama in which I was to play the part of queen. I tried to get from my dear old nurse Gowrie the reason of my mother's reluctance to the marriage; but she only called me a foolish child for fancying things, and tried to make me doubt my own convictions.

This of course I declined to do, and the consequence was, that on the eve of my wedding-day I broached the subject to mother of my own accord.

I had been gay and excited, as any child would be, at the bustle and stir in the house. A wedding that involved no separation from home and friends and

parents, a wedding that would in no wise disturb the even current of events, could not to a child's mind seem attended with very serious responsibilities and duties. It was rather like some gay pageant, that would pass quickly by, only leaving behind it something of reality and romance that, to a girl of my temperament, was not without distinct fascination.

I had run gaily about the house all day, with a pleasant sense of proud importance, had tried on my stiff brocade wedding-dress, and had been delighted to display myself in my finery to an admiring assemblage of old servants and retainers in the servants' hall. I had even rehearsed the marriage service very demurely with Oliver in the library, so as to "feel sure of my part," as I naively expressed it, and I had had quite a hot dispute with Cottingham, who had looked very glum all day, and had the audacity to abuse Rupert and his father in my very hearing. I flew out at him fiercely—for patience and forbearance were not my most marked characteristics—and I felt myself justified in standing up to-day in defence of my husband of to-morrow. What we said I do not now recollect, though I know our dispute waxed very warm. But one speech of Cottingham's remains engraved upon my memory, because it gave me the excuse I wanted for an interview with my mother.

"You may marry young Rupert to-morrow, for all

I care ; though I would stop the wedding if I could. But mark my word, young madam—you will never be his wife. Times change daily and hourly ; one sees better days ahead, even in these dark times. He is going away for years—let him go, and welcome ! When he comes back to claim you, he will see what kind of an answer he will get ! ”

Doubtless a great deal of this tirade was mere bravado, and his prophetic words were prompted by the anger of the moment. He often no doubt heard men speak thus ; for there were not lacking those who hoped to exclude the Duke of York from the succession, and bring in his daughters, Protestant princesses, whose supporters would, of course, be all Whig statesmen. In such a case there would be another complete revolution at the death of his majesty, and Cottingham’s nature led him to triumph in anticipation of a distant possibility.

I did not understand his words, and was too little of a politician to have any grasp of the situation of affairs ; but I did know that the times were difficult and dangerous, and I experienced that sense of helpless bewilderment that is one of the terrors and trials of childhood. I flew to my mother, with difficulty restraining my tears, and crept to my favourite spot, a footstool at her feet.

She was busy at the moment I entered, and I did

not attempt to disturb her. She caressed my head in token of acknowledgment of my presence, but she finished what she had in hand before she spoke, and then her words were few.

“ Well, little daughter ? ” she said gently.

I had by this time composed myself. I did not at once pour out my grievance against Cottingham, or repeat the words that had frightened me. I looked up wistfully into her face and asked,—

“ Mother, do you not wish me to wed Rupert to-morrow ? ”

“ Why do you ask me that, my child ? What has put the question in your mind ? ”

“ It is because you always look so grave, mother, and seem sad sometimes. Do you not love Rupert ? He is so fond of you.”

“ I love Rupert like a son, my child; I could not desire a husband for my daughter more to my liking, if—”

“ If what, mother ? ”

“ I was about to add, if you were both of an age to understand fully what you were about to take upon yourselves to-morrow.”

“ I do understand, mother,” I answered eagerly, and began to run through my ideas of wifely duties very glibly and with great good-will. Mother listened with a smile on her face that was half-sad, half-tender; and when I had done, she said,—

“I am glad thou understandest so well, my daughter, and I trust thou wilt prove able to practise what thou canst preach. But there are possible perils over thy future of which thou canst not dream now; and how will it go with thee, my child, if temptation comes upon thee when thy mother is no longer here to aid and counsel thee?”

When mother called us “thee” and “thou,” it always showed that she was thinking deeply. It was when we were alone with her, and she was giving us words of counsel and warning, that she generally fell into the form of speech that had been familiar to her in the days of her youth.

“What do you mean, mother?” I asked, trembling. “What perils? what temptations?” And then, as she did not answer all at once, I repeated to her some of the words that Cottingham had used, and asked, in accents of anxiety and fear, if they could ever prevent me from being Rupert’s wife.

Mother’s face was very grave and even a little stern, but the sternness was not for me, as I knew by the way she took my hands so tenderly in hers.

“Thy brother was wrong in speaking to thee thus,” she said gravely and slowly. “I would not have thy mind disquieted with hard problems that thou mayest never have to face. No, little daughter, they can never make you other than Rupert’s wife, when once

the words have passed between you that shall link your lives to-morrow for ever. Wilt thou ever remember this, my Maud?—ever keep in mind that thou art a wedded wife, and must remain true and faithful to thy husband so long as ye both do live? Canst thou be strong for his sake, if others should urge thee in days to come to forget him and seek happiness with another? Wilt thou be firm and steadfast, if they try to prove that a contract made by a child need not bind a woman, and promise thee that it shall be annulled by law and thy freedom restored to thee? Wilt thou remember always that words sworn before God can never be annulled, and that vows taken in His name cannot be broken by any act of man? Wilt thou remember all this, my child, if in days to come thy brother tries to tempt thee, and thy mother is not at thy side to counsel and help thee? Thou art young yet—I would thou wert older—but thou art not, I think, too young to understand that thou art vowing thyself for life. Think on my words, if ever a day of trial shall come, and pray that thou mayest be kept faithful."

"I will, mother, I will! I will!" I was moved and agitated by her words. I knelt at her knee, and took her hands in mine. "Mother dear, I promise always to be Rupert's faithful little wife. When we are grown up, I will go to him when he wants me,

and no one shall keep me away ; and I will never, never, never let anybody make me think that I am not as much his wife as you are father's. I love Rupert—I love him with all my heart. I will always be faithful, I promise—I promise ! ”

Mother bent her head and kissed me on the lips, as if to check the torrent of my eloquence. I understood her, and was silent.

“ I believe you, little one. I believe that you understand what you are about to do, and that you have the strength of mind and body to withstand opposition and temptation. You know, my child, where to go for strength in the hour of trial. Your mother will ever pray for you.”

After that we did not talk any more, but sat very still. I nestled up to mother's side, until the darkness fell upon us, and she dismissed me with a kiss to bed.

I do not remember my wedding-day itself so well as the day that had preceded it. I know that the household seemed astir from an early hour, and that everybody was bustling and excited. I had been awake quite a long time the previous night, and I slept late on into the morning, and nobody came to arouse me. So that when I did at last wake up, it was almost time for me to be dressed for the ceremony.

We were to be married in a little chapel in connection with one of Sir Charles Melville's manors. These private chapels, with their beautiful architecture and stained-glass windows, seemed somewhat Popish in mother's eyes; and this particular little chapel was one of the very few places of the kind that had escaped the destructive zeal of the Roundhead soldiers. It was almost perfect still; and I was pleased to be married there, for Rupert and I were very fond of the little place, and would often visit it together, when he would tell the long tales about his ancestors who lay sleeping in the vault beneath.

Nurse Gowrie and mother both came to dress me in my wedding-clothes. I do not know if I was considered a pretty child, but I remember feeling a glow of satisfaction as I beheld my reflection in a mirror on my way down to the hall. I was twelve years old, and tall for my age, and my eyes were dark and bright, and my skin pale and clear. My hair was short and curled round my head; but it was to grow long now that I was married, Nurse Gowrie said, and to-day my curls were concealed under a sort of coronet and white veil, of which I felt very proud. My little sisters were also in white, and they looked very pretty, I thought. Cottingham and Oliver had walked on in advance, but father and mother and we girls went in the family coach, which rumbled very leisurely along,

and jolted a great deal, for the roads were always full of holes and lumps.

I remember being married very well. I was not at all frightened, and I looked about me with some curiosity when I was not required to speak or to attend very particularly.

There were a good many finely-dressed people in the chapel, some of whom I knew, and some whose faces were strange. One of these faces fascinated me a good deal. It belonged to a man very richly dressed, and a complete stranger to me. His skin was very dark and sallow; his features were strongly marked, and seemed in a way familiar, though I could not imagine where I could have seen him. He stood beside Sir Charles Melville, looking on with a negligent air of amusement at the scene.

When the ceremony was concluded, and a little buzz of talk began amongst the bystanders, this dark stranger moved forward, everybody making way for him with an air of deep respect.

“By my troth, young lad, but you have won a fair bride for yourself. I must beg a kiss myself from those rosy lips,” and he bent forward half-laughing, as if he meant to kiss me. But I drew back a little, and answered boldly, “I belong to Rupert now. I shall not kiss anybody unless he allows me to.”

“Odds fish! but she has a spirit of her own, this

bride of yours ! She will assert herself one of these fine days, and you will have need to look to yourself," laughed the stranger, whilst all around stood dead silent, and Rupert whispered quickly and hurriedly,—

“Kiss him, Maud ; kiss his hand. It is the King !”

At that I felt rather frightened, and knelt down to kiss his hand, as I had seen people do in the few pictures we possessed of court life. But the King only laughed louder, and held me up and kissed my forehead ; and then he linked his arm within that of my Lord Halifax, and went out of the church with him, laughing and talking.

After that I remember very little about my wedding-day, though I know that we had a banquet in the hall, and that the tenants and poor people were feasted in the park, the weather being very warm and dry. I never heard clearly how it was the King had come to be there. I do not think mother quite liked it, and I heard no more about it at all. Indeed my thoughts were now almost entirely taken up with Rupert's speedy departure, and I was sad at heart in the thought of losing my husband and playfellow, whom I loved very dearly in my childish way.

But all Sir Charles's arrangements were made, and no lamentations on our part could hinder the approaching parting. Rupert and I spent the last days almost entirely together, vowing undying constancy

and unwavering love, and feeling a strange sort of appropriation one with another, unlike any ordinary childish affection.

Our last words to each other, when the day of parting came, were of our absolute fidelity. I saw his brave boy's face last dimly through a mist of tears. We little thought when and how we were to meet again!

CHAPTER IV.

D Y I N G C O U N S E L.

*Autobiographical fragment written by Lady Maud Melville,
treating of occurrences in the year 1689.*

IT is very difficult to analyse our feelings, especially when we are looking back to a period long passed. I can very well remember the rejoicing that followed the landing of William of Orange in our country, and the delight with which the news was received in our household ; yet I do not think, even at the first, I was able to share the general enthusiasm, and I am very sure that as time passed on I was often heavy-hearted and sad. I do not mean that my sadness had any connection with political matters, or that I regretted the flight from our shores of the Papist tyrant, whose unjust rule had stirred up the hatred of the whole nation. I was as glad as any one to be rid of a king who could not speak the truth, or keep his plighted word, and who seemed bent either on his own destruction or that of his distracted people. Nor had I any feeling of repugnance to the Dutch Stadt-

holder, himself a descendant of the house of Stuart, and the husband of our Princess Mary, whom people were already talking of making Queen. My sorrow and anxiety resulted from purely personal feelings, and were inseparably connected with my boy-husband Rupert, of whom I had seen nothing since the day he left us seven years ago.

The Melvilles were so stanchly attached to the house of Stuart, that it was impossible to feel certain of their adopting the popular cause, even when the claims of natural right and liberty seemed to point to it as the only just course to be taken. Rupert had been absent from England during all these years of misrule and abuse. Was it, then, likely that he would see matters as we did, who had endured so much anxiety, and seen so much misery as the result of tyranny and absolutism ? And if he were to ally himself with the fortunes of the banished king, what would be my duty in that case ? It was a sufficiently difficult question for any one to answer ; for me it was fraught with peculiar difficulties. It was long before I could settle upon any definite course of action. So much depended upon others—my parents, brothers, upon Rupert himself ; and just at the time when this strange, bloodless revolution took place, Rupert had been silent for an unusual length of time, and we did not know where he was or what he was doing.

If the carriage of letters in this country was a matter of difficulty and uncertainty, it can well be understood that our intercourse with our old friends abroad had been carried on in a very intermittent fashion during these past years. Sir Charles had died two years ago, when I was just seventeen, and Rupert had come of age a little before that. We thought at first that he would come back then, and that I should leave my father's house to be the mistress of his manors. But he had conceived a great desire to travel and see something of the world before returning home; and I think he received encouragement from my parents to do this. Mother's health had been failing fast of late, and I could see that she shrank from parting with me; whilst father, who was somewhat prematurely aged by the harassing life of anxiety he led, had grown to lean more and more upon Cottingham, and my brother had ever been a bitter antagonist to my marriage, and to the husband from whom I had been parted so long.

My own opinion was that Cottingham greatly hoped some mischance would befall Rupert upon his travels, and that he would never come back to claim his bride. The Manor property would then be mine, and I should be a wealthy widow, without ever having been a wife in anything but name. This suspicion on my part roused within me feelings of great indignation, and

helped to keep bright within me the light of loving loyalty towards Rupert that had been such an important element of my childhood. I suppose it would have been unnatural if my recollection of him had not grown a little dim with all these years of absence, when he no longer made, as it were, a part of my life. Sometimes I was sad and ashamed that I was unable to feel quite the same sense of personal love for my husband as I had done in bygone years; but I do not think my constancy ever changed or wavered, whilst one of the rare letters from him, couched in language of boyish love and homage, always brought back the old feeling of unalterable affection in a wave of almost passionate intensity. The least sneer or taunt on the part of Cottingham made me fire up quite in the old style in defence of Rupert; and my two little sisters always delighted to talk about him, and make plans for the future, when he would come back to claim me, and make me the lady of the Manor. My wedding was the one of their childish memories most clear and distinct; and when we were making plans together, after the manner of young maidens, Rupert seemed real enough, and I felt impatient for his return. There were other times, however, when days and weeks passed by, so full of pleasure, anxiety, or interest, that the thought of my husband hardly crossed my mind. It was difficult to realize that I

was a married woman; more difficult when I began to grow towards womanhood than when I had been a mere child, unconscious of the responsibilities of life.

My mother was my best friend; nor did she ever allow me to forget, when I began to see more of life, and mingle in gaieties suitable to my years, that I was not free as other girls, and that it behoved me to exercise discretion and moderation, and check any expression of admiration which young gallants might attempt to use towards me. She bid me show courtesy to all, yet make it plain that I was not to be won. My heart belonged to another, who must ever hold the first place in it.

I think, perhaps, that I am not by nature very susceptible, for none of Cottingham's dashing friends, or the men I met at other houses, tempted me for an instant to repent that I was not free. True, we lived quietly enough during the few years of King James's reign, for my father desired rather to avoid notice than to attract it; but still I saw something of life, and studied what I saw. I think, perhaps, my mother's influence had made me, despite my natural high spirits, more critical and observant than many girls at my age; and my rather peculiar position caused me to take more interest in public affairs than most young maidens. I had other interests, too, connected with the rich and poor around us, for I was

mother's almoner when increasing infirmity forced her to give up one by one her active habits.

But the intense excitement of the country during the months following the sudden flight of the King was much deadened to me from the fact that, early in 1689, mother became rapidly worse, and her health failed so visibly from day to day, that all my faculties were concentrated in the labours of nursing. I heard vague rumours of what was happening in the metropolis: I heard how William of Orange refused any dignity but that of absolute kingship, to be shared with his wife; I heard fragments of eager discussion about the Toleration Bill (in which mother, ill as she was, was deeply interested), the Comprehension Bill, which was never at all comprehensible to me, and the change of the court from Whitehall to Hampton Court, and then finally to Kensington. Father and all our friends were in a state of subdued elation and triumph. Lord Halifax continued in favour by the wonderful way he had of conciliating the dominant power. Cottingham could hardly contain his delight at the change in the face of affairs; but though I tried to sympathize in the satisfaction of others, my own heart was often heavy; for Rupert's name was hardly mentioned now, and if mentioned at all, it was spoken in accents of doubt and distrust. It was impossible to communicate with him and learn his views,

for we knew not where he was ; but there was a strong feeling, I could see, in many minds that he was pretty certain to link his fortunes with those of the hapless house of Stuart, to whom his forefathers had ever been loyal and devoted.

When the news reached us of the outbreak of war in Ireland, and King James's departure for that country, together with the French Count of Avaux and many other English and French gentlemen attached to him and his cause, a most disquieting rumour arose that young Sir Rupert Melville was in his train likewise. How this rumour was started, I know not ; I had some suspicion that it owed its origin to Cottingham's ill-will and dislike of my husband ; but it certainly gained ground in our immediate circle, and heads were often gravely shaken, and hints dropped even in my hearing, as to the advisability of cancelling any contract made with a young "Jacobite." It was Cottingham and his youthful associates who talked in this unguarded way. The older men were far more discreet ; besides, there seemed no kind of certainty that Rupert had mixed himself up in any active way with the political strife of the day. I thought it much more likely that he was still far away in distant lands. Melville was no very uncommon name, and if my brother heard of any Melvilles being engaged upon the unpopular side, he would

be certain to try to fasten the imputation upon my husband.

For my part, loyalty towards him blazed up with tenfold strength at the least suspicion of an attempt to separate us. I think had my mother been less ill, and had I known for certain where Rupert was, I should have fled from home to join him. But anything so romantic as a sudden flight was quite out of the question for me now. The warmth of the late spring and early summer, instead of restoring our sweet mother to any measure of health and strength, seemed but to prostrate her with increase of feebleness. It became clear, even to my unwilling eyes at length, that she would not be much longer with us ; and the sense of desolation that swept over me, as that thought forced its way home to my conviction, passes all power of expression.

My mother had ever been the sun and centre of my life. I had been her constant companion ever since my early childhood. Almost all I knew I had learned from her ; and she had been moulding my character and forming my opinions in a fashion that I *felt* rather than understood.

She had always been as a tower of strength to me, sheltering me from the difficulties of a position of some delicacy and peril. So far all had been indeed pretty smooth sailing, but clouds were gathering fast

upon the horizon now ; and just when it seemed as if I needed most sorely her guiding hand upon the helm, I was to be forced to launch my frail bark upon a dark and stormy sea, and steer it through the treacherous and dangerous waters alone.

Yet I do not think my sorrow was selfish in the main. I was too much wrapped up in the bare idea of losing mother to have much thought to spare for myself. I hardly left her night or day, and those long, sunny weeks of summer weather were all dark and dreary to me. The siege of Londonderry was going on, and mother's thoughts were very much with the poor starving citizens who were holding out so bravely for their religion and the Protestant cause. She had known much of the horrors of warfare in the days of her youth, and could realize the sufferings of the besieged garrison far better than any of us young ones could do.

I have always felt glad that she lived to hear the joyful news of its relief. We did not hear it till the first week in August, and she died on the fifteenth of the month. She did not believe that Rupert was fighting against the cause of religious liberty, even in support of the house of Stuart. He had ever shown a spirit of generous patriotism, and though loyal to a cause that had known much of error, had never been an advocate of error itself. He had seen and heard

so much of violence and tyranny upon the popular side, that it had blinded him to similar errors in absolute monarchy ; but mother and I agreed in this—that when he was of an age to see clearly and judge deliberately, he would not blindly rush to the conclusion that all must be right which our deposed king did, simply because he was the son of that First Charles who was his boyhood's hero. Rupert had imbibed too much of the spirit of mother's teaching to be altogether one-sided in his views of life ; and very many of the stanchest loyalists had already been alienated by the Popish bigotry and intolerance of King James. Rupert had always been stanch in his love for our English Church. He would be little likely, we thought, to support the policy of a monarch who was bent on subverting ancient liberties and our loved religion, and substituting a faith that was held in general abhorrence.

It was a great comfort to me that mother felt this confidence in Rupert. I had such faith in her judgment and in her power of discernment, that I was no longer afraid to trust my own opinion when I found it coincided with hers. People might tell *me* that I was young and enthusiastic, and unable to judge ; but no one could speak so of mother.

She talked much of Rupert during the last days of her life, but it was only on the night that preceded

her death that she spoke openly to me of all that was in her heart. We were alone that night. My father had been persuaded to leave the sickroom, in which he had kept watch all the day, and try to get some of the sleep he by this time sorely needed. He was the more easily persuaded as mother seemed better and easier that night. He even spoke of a possible amendment in her condition, and she answered him (with such a sweet smile), that she would be better soon. I knew what she really meant, and tears started to my eyes; but he smiled and kissed her, and went away with a look approaching satisfaction upon his worn face.

Mother looked after him with tender light in her eyes. When the door had closed, she said to me,—

“ My child, hast thou noted any change in thy father of late ? ”

I answered that I had not. In truth, I had been so absorbed by mother’s condition, that I had had little thought to spare for aught beside. I asked her to what she alluded.

“ It has been growing upon him of late years,” was the reply. “ I know not what to call it—it hardly seems to amount to a disease; but there is undoubtedly some slight weakening of mental power. My physician, to whom I named the subject, told me that it resulted, without doubt, from the long strain upon him all his

life through—the peril and difficulty that has ever beset or threatened to beset his path. He has had hard work to steer safely through the shoals and quicksands of political life, and the struggle has left its traces upon him."

"I have noticed nothing."

"Belike thou hast not, dear child; for thou canst not see beneath the flowing wig how snow-white is the hair that, but a few years back, was black as the raven's wing; thou hast no opportunity of noting in his converse that weakness and vacillation of purpose so foreign to his old firmness and resolve. He looks to me and to thy brother for guidance, when but a short while back he would have taken counsel only with himself. And the dependence increases with the flight of time. Hast thou not observed of late that he can do nothing and go no whither without Cotttingham?"

"I think I have noticed that; but Cotttingham is to be married almost at once. He cannot depend upon him to the same extent then."

But mother shook her head.

"When I am gone, my child—and death is drawing very nigh—thy father, thou wilt see, will never suffer thy brother to leave him also. He will make Cotttingham's wife mistress of this house in my stead, and will depend upon him and her, even as he now does

upon me. Thy eldest brother will virtually be master here ; and it is the thought of this rule that makes me tremble for thee, my child."

In good faith, I began to tremble for myself. I knew Cottingham's avowed enmity to Rupert and the Melville alliance ; I knew, too, that the high-born, haughty woman he was about to wed shared to the full all his prejudices. She was closely connected with many persons now in high places, and would doubtless have great influence with those who had the power of pronouncing my wedding contract null and void. When I had heard Cottingham talk in his haughty fashion of doing this, I had always felt that my parents would take my side and fight my battle—my mother from her sense of the sacredness of the marriage-vow ; my father from his long-standing attachment to the name of Melville. But if mother were to be taken away by death, and if father grew to be merely a tool in the hands of Cottingham and his wife, what could I hope to effect against them ? A wave of great desolation swept over me. I sank on my knees beside the bed, clasping mother's hands in mine.

"O mother, mother, do not leave me !" I implored. "O mother, what shall I do without you ? I am afraid—afraid ! "

Mother and I knew each other so well that there

was no need to say what it was I feared. She read my thoughts just as if I had spoken them aloud.

“ My daughter must learn to find strength greater than any her mother can give ; she must be brave and resolute to do right, even in the face of difficulty and opposition. I have tried to train her aright, and she has the blood of soldier-patriots in her veins. Surely I need not fear that she will faint or falter in the struggle, when she sees her duty and recognizes it fully.”

“ O mother, I will try ; I will try to be brave and faithful. But a girl is so helpless, all alone, with the men of her family against her.”

“ I know it, my child, I know it, and my heart bleeds for thee often. I have thought upon thy future hour after hour, for weeks and months, ay, and years too ; and in my own way I have been working for thee. Rise up, my child, and come close to me, for I have much to say to thee this night. I dare wait no longer ; I must speak all that is in my heart.”

I sat upon the bed beside mother, who was lying propped up with pillows. I fought vehemently against the storm of emotion that was striving to overcome me, and after a short, sharp struggle, I obtained the mastery and became calm.

“ My daughter, thou knowest that the danger most like to beset thy path is that of being induced or

coerced into being unfaithful to the marriage-vow pronounced whilst thou wert still of tender years. I know thy brother's violent antagonism to thy husband. I also know that he is set on uniting thee in marriage with one whose influence would greatly advance his own prosperity in life. Thy sisters are too young to be of any assistance to thee; and though I hope and trust that thy brother Oliver would befriend thee, he is too reserved to speak his mind clearly even to his mother, and he is oft in London, engaged in legal studies, and cannot safely be counted on as an ally. Our faithful Gowrie will ever be stanch to thee and me; but what power has a servant over a mind like thy brother's? Thy father thou canst, I fear, no longer reckon on for support; and Cottingham's wife will take part with her husband, as is but fitting for a wife to do. Thou wilt stand very much alone, I fear me, my child; and therefore I have done what I could to provide for thee a protector and, if need be, an asylum of refuge."

I had been feeling deeply depressed up till this moment, but now a gleam of light seemed to penetrate the darkness.

"A protector! an asylum! O mother mine—who, what, where is it?"

"Listen, my child, and I will tell thee all. Thou knowest, perhaps, that when thy father wedded me,

he raised me from a lot lower than his own. My father was a man in humble circumstances, though of gentle blood, and in my youth I little thought that it would be my hap to be raised to rank and affluence. Since my marriage I have seen hardly anything of my family. Our paths in life have lain widely asunder. Yet I have written occasionally to my brother Thomas, the brother who was ever my comrade and friend in youth; and though I have only seen him once since we parted at my marriage, and that many years ago, he loves me warmly yet, as he has ever done, and he has lately passed his word to befriend my child as he would protect and cherish his own, should any need arise."

"O mother, tell me of this good uncle! Is he the one who lives in London and carries on some prosperous business there?"

"He did so until late years, when his wealth enabled him to retire from business and mingle somewhat more in public matters than he did formerly. He has lately received an official appointment as Master or Keeper of Newgate—that prison of which we hear from time to time such fearful accounts. I trust he may have power to do something towards mitigating the sufferings of the prisoners, and putting down the abuses that rise in such places. But it is hard to check evils of long standing, and I know

not how far Thomas may be able to act as I trust he would wish. Yet methinks he must be a man of kindly heart, and he has written me that thou shalt ever find a protector in him, if thou standest in need of one. His wife is a godly woman, and though both he and she are of the party who love not the deposed king nor his ways, yet they hold that a marriage-vow is not to be broken, and that thy duty is towards thy husband, even though he be one whose acts and opinions they deplore—which as yet is by no means proven."

"But, mother, would father, would Cottingham ever allow me to go to visit this uncle and aunt? Methinks my brother would speak with scorn of a man who occupied a post so little elevated as that of governor of a common jail. Might he not say such a house was not a fit place for his sister to reside in?"

"He might, 'tis true. Yet the Fells are wealthy people, and thy brother knows the value of wealth. Moreover, it might be possible, in an absence of thy brother, to get thy father's consent to the plan, and take thy way thither, with faithful Gowrie, before he can return to hinder thee. Once there, thou wouldest be safe, I think, for Thomas Fells is not a man to be lightly set at naught, and the master of a prison should know how to play the part of jailer. At least, to place thee beneath his protection is all that I can

do for thee. He knows the difficulties that beset thy path ; and thou canst tell thy father and thy brother that upon my death-bed I spoke to thee of my wish that thou shouldest become acquainted with kinsfolk whom thou at least wilt not despise. Take Gowrie with thee an thou goest ; she knows thy uncle, for she was my maid in early days, and has followed my fortunes with true fidelity. I would that she should remain with thee, and she has vowed to be to thee what she has ever been to me. And now one thing more, my child : take this key and unlock with it yonder oaken press ; within the second drawer thou wilt find an ebony box. Bring it hither to me."

I obeyed, and brought the box, which was very heavy, across to the bed, and laid it down beside mother. From a little pouch she kept always near her, she produced a small silver key of curious workmanship, which she presented to me.

"Take this, my child, and take the box likewise ; it is all thine. The box contains five hundred golden guineas, and it was given me for thee by Sir Charles Melville ere he left the country, never, as he truly believed, to return. Perchance he felt that at some future time thou mightest have need of gold of thine own ; and I have kept this treasure for thee—a secret from all the world—and I would that thou shouldest look upon it as a sort of trust, to be employed, if need

arise, for thy husband's use or for thine own, in the struggle that may befall thee to keep thy faith with him. I am glad that thou wilt not be without the power that gold can give. Let none save Gowrie know that thou hast such a treasure, and let it be spent in no cause save that of thy husband."

I promised with faltering voice to do as mother wished, and by her desire took away the box and locked it safely up in a deep press that stood in my own apartment. When I returned, a gray shadow seemed to have fallen upon her face, but she held out her hands to me with a look of deep, yearning tenderness.

" My child, my little daughter, who hast been such a loving, tender daughter to me, God grant that thy life may yet be bright and happy. Yet should it be thy lot to be set apart, as it were, from other women, to live thy life alone for the sake of one whose fate thou mayest perchance never know, let not thy heart fail thee, nor do thou let thyself be unfaithful to thy sacred marriage-vow. If the sweet duties of wife and mother are not to be thine, remember, my child, the hundreds and thousands of sick and needy, widows and orphans, mourners and desolate, whom thou canst relieve and succour, to whom thou canst give the love and care denied to thee in other ways. My child, I can talk no more ; yet thou hast heard me speak

thus a thousand times before. What need for more words? Be faithful, be true to God, to thy husband, to thy brethren wherever they be. Heaven bless and keep thee, my sweet daughter. May we be united at length in that bright land where partings shall be no more!"

Mother died ere another sun had set—I can write of it no more.

CHAPTER V.

THE PLOT.

THE death of the gentle and pious Lady Wakefield was an immense loss to her own family, and soon brought about a considerable revolution in domestic matters. Her husband's mental powers had of late given signs of a premature decay. A very gradual but progressive malady, such as would be called in these days softening of the brain, had attacked him, and though as yet he appeared to outsiders, and even to his younger children, much as he had ever done, yet his eldest son was fully aware that his father leaned upon him, and looked to him to settle every matter both with reference to the estate and other things of import at home ; and very soon the girls began to find out that their eldest brother was master of the house, virtually, if not in name, and that it was useless to appeal to their father from any command of his. Luckily for them, the two youngest girls, Phoebe and Bessie, were gentle,

pliable, and docile young creatures, who admired their dashing dictatorial brother, took life easily and tranquilly, found plenty of occupation in the still-room or at their embroidery frames, and never troubled their pretty heads over the stirring political events of the times, or attempted to form opinions of their own thereupon.

But the elder sister, Maud, was cast in a very different mould. She had loved books and learning from a child, and her quick, precocious intelligence had been awakened and deepened by the peculiar circumstances that surrounded her own life. She possessed opinions and views of her own. She was little disposed to submit tamely to her brother's rule. Dutiful towards her parents, and devoted as she had ever been to her mother, she had a strong will, a strong nature, and an ingrained spirit of courageous independence not easily daunted. Her intense grief for her mother's death kept her in a state of quiescence for several months; but when the time came to assert her independence, she was not found lacking in resolution or bravery.

It was in August 1689 that Lady Wakefield breathed her last, and during the remainder of that year the family at the Priory House kept very quiet. Lord Wakefield and his daughters were wrapped in sorrow and mourning for the loss of one so dear to

them all ; whilst Cottingham was too much engrossed in his private affairs to have much attention to spare for what was passing in the great world without.

He was engaged in wooing fair Mistress Hester Castleton, the only daughter and heiress of Sir Robert Castleton of Edgeware. Sir Robert was high in fame at Court just then, and an alliance with his beautiful and wealthy daughter would raise Cottingham not a little in his own estimation and in that of others. It was now arranged that the marriage should take place early in the coming year, and that Lady Cottingham should be installed as mistress of the Priory House. Lord Wakefield could not endure the thought of parting from his son. Every month as it passed showed him less capable of managing his own affairs, and more dependent upon others. It was no part of Cottingham's plan to let another usurp the place he held of adviser and controller of his father, and Mistress Hester, who was to the full as fond of power as her future husband, had no objection at all to exercise her sway over Lord Wakefield's fine establishment.

During the months that elapsed between her mother's death and her brother's marriage Maud had naturally been at the head of the household, learning, as was her way, all that she could in that capacity, and evincing a power of administration that surprised and pleased the old servants, who looked up to her with love and

respect, though her ability was little observed in other quarters. Her constant companionship with her mother of late years had taught her a great deal, and her natural aptitude and quickness taught her still more ; but she did not love domestic duties for their own sake, and in no way resented the proposed transfer of them to her brother's wife when he should bring her home.

She had known Hester more or less intimately for many years, but of late Sir Robert had been living the greater part of his time in London, and the girls had not met as frequently as of old.

Shortly before the wedding, however, the baronet and his daughter came to spend a week at the Priory, and Maud was thrown much into the society of her former companion. Maud was at this time twenty, and Hester three years her senior, but to all appearances they were very much of an age, and certainly in mental and intellectual development the balance was rather in favour of the younger girl.

Hester was very handsome and rather haughty in appearance. An only child of wealthy parents, she had had more of her own way than was usual with girls in those days. She had lost her mother some seven years ago, and had ever since been her father's constant companion and confidante. She felt as if she knew a great deal more than ordinary stay-at-home

country girls, and she was distinctly more the accomplished woman of the world than any of Lord Wakefield's daughters. Phœbe and Bessie admired her immensely, and submitted to her dicta as if she were already mistress of their father's house ; but Maud sometimes smiled at her assumptions of superiority and experience, and even ventured to dissent from her in frank and fearless fashion.

Yet they never quarrelled ; indeed it was difficult to quarrel with Maud, she was so self-contained and tranquil, without being in the least spiritless or yielding. But there did come a day, shortly before Hester left, when a conversation took place which tried Maud's patience more than anything that had gone before.

She had been showing to the guest—so soon to be the mistress of the house—many of the stores of linen, comestibles, and family heirlooms which formed an important item in household properties in bygone days. She taught her friend many of the things in which she herself had been instructed by her mother, and showed so much knowledge and comprehension of the subject, that when they had returned to the south parlour together Hester said,—

“ In good sooth, Maud, it seems to me that you will make a more fitting house-mistress than I shall. I never troubled my head over all these matters that

you know so well. I wonder how you like the thought of yielding all up to me ? I wonder if in your heart you do not resent the thought that I am coming ? Would you be glad if we returned to our first plan and took a mansion in London, instead of living at the Priory ? ”

“ No, indeed,” answered Maud, with quick emphasis. “ I should be vexed and disturbed did such a thought seriously suggest itself.”

“ Truly ? And why so, fair sister, if I may call you so beforehand ? Does it not please you to be the mistress of this fine house and lands ? ”

“ I am glad to do my duty so long as it is my duty, but it would ill please me to be bound and fettered to this place, as I should be, did Cottingham leave us. For then father would come to lean on me, as he now does on him, which thing would put me to some straits if the time should come when I needs must leave him, as indeed it is like I may have to do any day now.”

Hester looked at her rather keenly and sharply, and the next question was put with something of a studied coolness.

“ In faith you speak in riddles now, Maud. Why should you be called upon to leave him ? Is any suitor paying his addresses so earnestly that you fear to be taken by storm and carried bodily away ? ”

It had not been unobserved by Maud that Hester had of late entirely ignored the fact of her marriage, as Cottingham had done indeed for years, and always spoke as if she and her younger sister were exactly on an equality ; but never before had she ventured to go as far as this, and the colour rose slowly in Maud's cheek as she heard this unblushing question.

" Methinks, Hester, that your spirits carry you too far," she answered, with a certain grave dignity. " How can you talk to me of suitors, when I have a husband living ? "

Hester laughed a little uneasily.

" I had forgot," she began ; adding, with an assumption of airy brightness, " Surely you are not thinking of leaving home for him ? "

" If he wants me I shall go to him. Every day I feel that he may come or send for me. It is not my wish to desert my father needlessly, but my first duty must ever be to my husband. Therefore am I glad, Hester, that you are coming to take my place."

Hester tried to laugh, but ended by looking very grave.

" My dear sister," she said, " do you not yet understand that there is nothing really binding in a marriage like yours ? The law can give you speedy release ; and indeed, if I mistake not, it will, for Cottingham will never suffer his sister to become the

property of one who is in revolt against the King, and might at any time be condemned to exile and poverty."

Maud's eyes flashed rather dangerously.

"What God has joined together, let not man put asunder. Hester, let me speak frankly to you. I am Rupert Melville's wedded wife. I was twelve years old when I vowed fidelity and love to him--old enough, thanks to my mother's careful teaching, to understand in a great measure the sacredness of the vow, and some of the responsibilities to which I pledged myself. It is useless for Cottingham or for any others to threaten or protest. I am Maud Melville now, not Maud Lifford, and my first duty is towards my husband. I will not be separated from him by any legal process. I am a wife, and I will be true to my duties, and to him to whom I am indissolubly bound in the sight of God. I know Rupert well. He will be faithful on his side, as I am on mine. Some day he will come for me, or send for me; and when that day comes, I shall go to him, and no power shall keep me away. It is a mere waste of breath to argue or dispute about it. My mind is made up; my mother's blessing will be with me. Her counsel, her wishes shall be obeyed."

Hester had stolen several glances at her companion as she had proceeded. She was clever enough to

know that it would be useless to try to make a jest of the matter. She therefore lifted her eyebrows in compassionate inquiry, and asked,—

“ But what if he is exiled as a rebel ? ”

“ I will share his exile.”

“ He may not wish it.”

“ Then I will stay behind, and rest not day or night till I have obtained his pardon.”

“ More romantic than practicable, my dear.”

“ I do not know. Lord Halifax is a good friend of ours. He could, methinks, procure me an audience with our kind Queen. They say her influence with the King is great, and ever inclines towards the side of mercy.”

Hester was silent, considering Maud’s face with some attention. Presently the young wife spoke again.

“ I know not why Cottingham is so bent on persuading himself and others that Rupert has taken up arms on behalf of King James. We have heard nothing with any certainty to that effect, and it is my belief that he is still travelling in more distant lands. Had he been as near home as this, I am confident that I should have had news of him. My brother was ever unfriendly towards Rupert, and it pleases him to think and speak ill of him ; but he knows nothing certain to his discredit. The worst he

can say is that we have been long without tidings ; but that is no proof of crime."

" True ; but the Melvilles were ever loyal to the Stuarts."

" I know that well ; yet is not our present King grandson of our First Charles, son of his daughter, and married to a Stuart princess ? Were not the Melvilles faithfully attached to their Church ? And if they must choose between the direct succession and Popish slavery, or a more distant Stuart branch and freedom for their Church, why should not they, like so many others, choose the latter rather than the former ? Have not many, many families, as stanch as the Melvilles to Royalist traditions, transferred allegiance from the Popish James to his Protestant daughter ? Why should not Rupert do the same ? James left the throne vacant of his own accord, and his daughter and her husband were installed there by the general voice of the nation. Why is Cottingham so resolved that Rupert must be one of those who would follow and fight for the exiled King ? He has no facts to go upon, and it is not right to condemn any man unheard."

Again Hester was silent ; argument was not her *forte*. She preferred keeping to safer and more practical ground.

" And suppose it is as you say, and he has not re-

turned—suppose many years go by without a word from him, what will you do then?—keep faithful to a name, an idea? If he were to die in foreign parts, you might never hear tidings of his death, and what would you do then?"

"Try to make my life useful to those about me, and live in hopes of Rupert's return."

"With another wife perhaps—"

"Hester, I will not permit jests on this subject; and if you speak in earnest, it shows that you little know Rupert and the standard of Melville honour."

"My dear, you do not know much of the men of the day; you were brought up by a Puritan saint. Rupert was but sixteen when he was married to a little playfellow. Do you think that your bright eyes will be a charm strong enough to steel his heart against all the southern beauties he may meet? Would you have the reluctant hand, when the heart has been given elsewhere?"

"I am Rupert's wife," answered Maud in a tone that admitted of no further argument; "nothing can change that."

This was all that was said then; and soon afterwards Cottingham was married, and brought home his wife to the Priory House. The days of mourning for the late Lady Wakefield were practically ended then, and as the Earl was sinking into greater quietude and

apathy every month, the young Viscount had everything his own way, filled the house with gay company, and grew by rapid steps to look upon himself as master and lord of all he surveyed.

Of all his friends and acquaintances the one he most admired and desired to stand well with was one Humphrey Chalcote, a man of large property and keen intellect, who appeared likely to rise high in the new administration. Cottingham had no great parts or talents himself, and he was well aware of this; but he had a sharp eye for seeing who were most likely to attain eminence and distinction amongst his associates, and he made it his aim and object to conciliate the good-will of these fortunate beings, and obtain a sort of reflected glory from the light they would shed around them.

Mr. Chalcote was a practised horseman, and was endowed with a fearlessness that made him more adventurous than the more prudent of his compatriots. He and his two trusty serving-men would ride out from London to the Priory any hour of the day, careless alike of the bad state of the roads and the proximity of the highwaymen who infested more or less all the lonely places where travellers were likely to pass. A brush with these light-heeled gentry was pronounced rather enjoyable than otherwise; and many were the thrilling tales of peril and adventure

with which he would entrance the willing ears of the ladies when he reached his journey's end. He became so much at home at the Priory that his coming and going attracted little more notice than that of Cottingham himself. He was not a very young man—that is to say, he was approaching thirty—but he had a pleasant, easy frankness that was decidedly attractive, and Phoebe and Bessie declined to believe that he was any older than Oliver, who was so much graver and more quiet.

It soon became obvious to the Viscount and his wife that what Cottingham had before suspected was no more than the truth, and that Chalcote was greatly struck by Maud, and was rapidly losing his heart to her. Of the fact that she was married already he had no idea. Maud did not speak of Rupert to casual acquaintances, and Cottingham was far too anxious that the unwelcome connection should be altogether forgotten ever to name it in any way. A man like Humphrey Chalcote was just the husband his sister needed ; and when it became evident that he contemplated paying his addresses to her (little though she in her inexperience knew it), the brother felt it time that something definite should be done for his sister's release from the legal bond that still kept her tied to Rupert. His wife warned him that Maud would not be tractable on the point, and as she was now no child,

but a resolute woman, with a strong will of her own, it might not prove an easy matter to effect her release against her own will. A brief tentative interview with the girl herself proved plainly to Cottingham that his wife had but spoken the truth; and as nothing definite could be urged against Rupert—no disloyalty actually proved against him—it might be difficult to annul the marriage whilst the bride herself was resolved to be faithful to her vow. If she could be brought to reason, and induced to lodge a complaint, or a lament at the hardness of being irrevocably bound to one who was apparently lost in foreign lands, or had secretly allied himself with the malcontent Jacobites, then something might be done; but without her submission it seemed hopeless to stir in the matter.

The difficulty was how to coerce her into submission. A family conclave was held over this matter, and it was Oliver who had the credit of hitting upon the plan considered most likely to succeed.

Oliver was one of those reserved, silent men who are little known even in their own family, and who give their real confidence only very rarely. Maud had an instinct that Oliver was secretly her friend, but she could not venture to count too much upon his support, and the Cottinhams had no idea that he was in any way in sympathy with the refractory sister.

“Look you here, Cottingham,” said Oliver, when

admitted to the conclave, that comprised old Lord Wakefield and his eldest son, together with Hester. "If my lady will not yield to fair means, why not resort to foul ?"

"What do you mean, Oliver ?"

"Why, try the effect of ostracism. Send her away somewhere, where she will be in a manner starved—where she will see no cultivated or intellectual people, and will breathe an air different from anything she has known. Chalcote perhaps will be willing to visit her occasionally in her banishment, and she will no doubt value his attentions more then than she does now. She is too happy here ; she has all she wants, and cares not to change her estate. Try what a little discipline will do—try the mental starvation of exile."

"Not a bad thought, in good sooth. But where to send the girl ?"

"I can advise on that point likewise. Send her to our worthy uncle Fells, lately appointed Governor of Newgate. I have been from time to time myself to see him. He and his wife are worthy folks, who would be but too honoured by a visit from one of Lord Wakefield's daughters. My lady would have no possible cause for complaint as regards creature comforts, for they are wealthy folks, and live in ease and plenty. But you may guess what kind of society is to be found within the precincts of a common jail,

and our fair sister is not wont to love association with those of a coarse and vulgar nature. Let her be banished thither, with the injunction that there she remains until she has thought better of her obstinacy, and you will see if she will not speedily look upon life in quite a new light. It may of course take time to effect such a change, but if I err not, a visit to Newgate will act as beneficially in her case as it does in that of many others."

Oliver, having said his say, relapsed into silence, and let his brother and the others discuss the new idea as they chose. But it did not surprise him that, after quite a short conversation, they were unanimous in declaring that no better plan was likely to be hit upon; and Oliver was commissioned to take a letter from Lord Wakefield to Mr. Fells on the next occasion of his journey to town, to ask him if he would take in this unmanageable daughter until such time as she should come to her senses.

Oliver promised compliance with this request, and strolled from the room with a smile on his face.

CHAPTER VI.

OLIVER'S MISSION.

A FEW days later, on a fine afternoon early in April, Oliver Lifford was to be seen threading his way through the narrow lanes and streets that divided his pleasant chambers in the vicinity of Lincoln's Inn from the great thoroughfare of Holborn.

The London of those days was not much like the great metropolis of the present time, although the lines and names of the principal streets remain the same for the most part; and here and there, in out-of-the-way corners, a quaint old building still stands, bearing very much the same look as it bore a couple of centuries ago.

But the state of the pavements, the roadway, and the manner in which the drainage was managed, were all so execrable that in rainy weather some of the thoroughfares, especially those which were on a slope, were barely passable for foot passengers. Regular torrents of black water, laden with refuse of every

kind, roared down Snow Hill and Ludgate Hill at such seasons, and the wheels of passing carts or coaches dashed the unpleasant liquid over the clothes of the passers-by.

The shops had no numbers, but were distinguished by signs that gave a brilliant and picturesque aspect to the streets ; and in fine dry weather, and by daylight, a walk was by no means unpleasant. But after night-fall there was a certain amount of risk to be encountered ; for many of the streets were entirely unlighted, and thieves and ruffians abounded, whilst the watchmen were as a rule so timid, pusillanimous, or dishonest that they were never to be depended upon, preferring to spend their time in ale-houses rather than in the discharge of an unwelcome and sometimes perilous duty.

Such streets as were lighted according to Edward Henning's patent fared somewhat better. Still, one oil lamp over every tenth house, lighted only on moonless nights during the winter months, did not give any very marvellous illumination, and quietly-disposed or timid people preferred to keep within their own doors after dark, and never ventured abroad unarmed or unattended.

Oliver, however, was well used to the city and its ways, and naturally had no particular fault to find with them, never having known anything better. He made his way along the dirty lanes with the care of

long practice, and struck into Holborn just beyond Shoe Lane, at the spot where, nearly five-and-twenty years before, the desolating ravages of the Great Fire had been stayed. Turning to the right, he proceeded along Holborn and Snow Hill, and the improved character of the buildings on either hand testified to the fore-thought of the citizens, who had rebuilt their houses with brick of a fair quality, in place of the wooden erections that had fallen such an easy prey to the destroying element. The mistake made in the rebuilding of the city was in keeping to the old tortuous and narrow lines of the streets—a mistake from which we suffer up to the present day; but, architecturally, the new buildings were a great advance upon the old, and Sir Christopher Wren's unique genius had a wonderful field in which to exercise itself in planning and rebuilding some of the eighty-nine churches destroyed by the fire, including the cathedral of St. Paul's.

Just beyond Snow Hill lay Oliver's present destination, which was the celebrated prison of Newgate. It seems impossible now to determine how far this memorable building was affected by the Great Fire. Undoubtedly it lay in a region which was devastated by the flames, and some historians have declared it to have been destroyed in the general wreck. But there is no authentic record of this, so far as I can ascertain; and a writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, about a

century later (who might possibly have heard it from an eye-witness), distinctly states that the building, though injured, was not destroyed at that time.

However that may have been, the gateway, as it stood in 1690, was a fine structure, though, as the prison was twice subsequently partially destroyed by fire and rebuilt, once in 1770, and again in 1783, after the George Gordon Riot, it was not the gateway with which we are most familiar from drawings. The thoroughfare, as far as the gate, went by the name of Holborn, and afterwards changed to that of Newgate Street. Prisoners were lodged in the three stories of the building that formed the gateway and spanned the street, and also in a supplementary building running parallel with Newgate Street on its north side—to the right hand, therefore, of any one entering from Holborn. This extra accommodation dated from the Commonwealth, but appears only to have comprised the ground-floor. Possibly warders and jailers may have been lodged above, but of that I can speak with no certainty. At least, from the overcrowded condition of the prison, it was plain that the accommodation was very insufficient for the needs of the miserable inhabitants, and to this cause may fairly be attributed the outbreaks of jail-fever, which raged so fiercely at times as to decimate the inmates of the prison, and from which it was never really free.

To the north of the gateway, or on the left hand of any one advancing from Holborn, stood the house of the keeper or governor. This house, in the last reign, had won for itself no enviable notoriety. The keeper was a man of low type, one Walter Conday, of whom it was said that "he hath at this day made his house the nursery of rogues, prostitutes, pickpockets, and thieves; where they were held and entertained, and the whole society met." It appeared that the authorities dared not at that time commit him for fear damaging reports should get about as regards the sheriffs, who were supposed to be responsible for the keeper and prison generally; but they spoke of "dealing with him by artifice," and probably succeeded in getting rid of him shortly, installing in his place the more humane, honest, and enlightened Mr. Fells.

That the new keeper was inclined to err on the side of mercy rather than severity appears from the fact that in 1696 he got into trouble with the authorities, by whom he was accused of conniving at the escape of prisoners, and of too great leniency to criminals under his charge, especially Sir John Fenwick. He succeeded, however, in clearing himself of all that was offensive in these charges, and retained his post for many years.

At the time of my story, of course, none of these troubles had come upon him. He was newly installed

in his office, and had instituted no changes, nor taken any active steps for the redress of abuses which he could not fail to see. He had lived long enough in the world to know that it behoves a man in an official position to walk warily, and to avoid giving ground of offence even in a good cause. Moreover, the condition of the prison, and the misery of its inhabitants, did not strike him with the horror it would have excited had he lived a century later, or in the open country instead of in a close city ward. Sanitary conditions were so little understood in those days, that to live in the midst of filth and pollution appeared the natural condition of the mass of the people. The general use of the new river water in the city was not the result of distrust of the water of the old wells, but simply because these had been filled up by the ruins of the fire, and it was easier to lay on water from the reservoir than to dig them out afresh. The plague began to die out from the time the new water was introduced, but it was for a later generation to discover that there was anything unhealthy in drinking water out of wells dug in ground saturated with sewage. To our forefathers water was water from whatever source it came.

The fearfully unsanitary state of our large prisons, therefore, attracted little attention, and excited less compassion. Persons who set the law at defiance

must take the consequences. Those who could pay could purchase immunity from the worst hardships, and obtain a very fair amount of comfort. Those who could not had to endure the misery and privations of their wretched existence as best they might.

Oliver was fairly familiar by this time with the exterior of the prison, and with the interior of the governor's house. Mr. Fells had been a mercer in the city for the best part of half a century, first as a lad beneath his father's governance, and later on as his own master. His honesty and careful attention to business had brought him fortune ; and there were many among his friends who had wondered greatly that, after retiring from active business in the city, he should, instead of living at ease on the fruit of his labours, accept the arduous and by no means agreeable duties of the Keeper of Newgate.

The fact of the case was, that Mr. Fells was of a temperament which finds idleness intolerable, and ease a burden, unless it is associated with some active duty. The two years of inactivity he had passed since he handed the business over to his son and retired from its practical administration had been very tedious to him ; and when this post had been offered, and indeed pressed upon him, he had accepted it with alacrity, not for the thought of the gain it might bring, but on account of the occupation it would afford him.

He was sixty years old when he took up his residence in his new abode, but he hardly looked fifty, so hale and hearty was his appearance, despite his city life, so active were his habits, and so energetic his administration. He had taken no little pride and pleasure in the furnishing and decoration of his house. His former occupation had made him a connoisseur in textile fabrics, and his curtains, carpets, and hangings were considered a marvel of beauty and luxury by those who visited him in his new abode. It seemed curious to some official persons, who had vivid remembrances of the house in the days of Conday, to find it thus transformed into a mansion that would not be despised by a prince. Some mocked at the lavish expenditure of the city Croesus, but Thomas Fells was not a man to be turned from his purpose, or laughed out of any scheme on which he had set his mind. So his house was made fit for the reception of his wife, and for something approaching a year they had now been living there.

Oliver had first visited his uncle and aunt at his mother's request, with little expectation of finding anything congenial in their society; but having gone once to please her, he went again to please himself, and gradually came to be tolerably familiar with the house and its *habitues*. Arthur Fells, the only son, was a pleasant, well-educated young man, now em-

ployed in the management of his father's lucrative business. He had been both to school and college, and he frequented a coffee-house where all the current views of the day were discussed and canvassed, and he was very well versed in all topics of public interest, and could talk with ease on a variety of subjects. Thomas Fells himself, though somewhat more rough in exterior than his son, was a man of much shrewd common-sense and some book learning; and there was a certain spiciness in his talk, when he could be drawn into conversation, that was not without its attraction. His wife was a sweet, gentle woman, not at all unlike Lady Wakefield in the calibre of her mind and in the opinions she held. Both had been reared in very much the same school and under the same influences, and though their paths in life had been widely different, both retained the stamp which that particular Puritan training seemed so often to leave behind.

Possibly it was the vague, indeterminate likeness to his mother that had first attached Oliver to her. However that may be, he and his aunt were now on very friendly terms and he went in and out of the house pretty much at will. If they held a social gathering of any kind, Oliver was reckoned upon as one of the regular guests; and as he met men of an interesting and often of a very cultured type at his

uncle's house, he never declined an invitation if he could help it.

Great men, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, were seldom to be seen there ; but struggling authors, poets, actors, men of science with their heads full of ideas that were flouted by the world as preposterous, or mechanics with patents that nobody would buy, flocked to the hospitable mansion in Newgate, to cheer their souls by recounting their woes to sympathetic listeners, and their bodies by partaking of that good and plentiful fare under which Mr. Fells's board ever groaned.

Many kindly acts were done by the ex-merchant, and he was greatly beloved in a wide if somewhat obscure circle. Oliver was generally interested and amused by the talk he heard within these doors, but to-day his errand was not on his own account. He was acting as his brother's envoy, and had a diplomatic mission to perform. He was playing a double game, and he knew it himself, if nobody else did. He felt no shame, however, as he wished no thanks from Maud when she should discover that she owed to his diplomacy the release from her present difficult position. He liked to go on his way quietly and methodically, without raising in any one's mind the idea of his being a partisan of any cause. As a barrister, this extreme coolness of temperament was

leading him into repute. He had obtained some signal success in a case where nobody believed he could find a word to say. Some persons now regarded him as a man with a career before him.

Oliver found Mrs. Fells alone in her pleasant withdrawing-room, with its odd little sunny window facing westward down Holborn, though pleasantly removed from the din and bustle of the street. Another window looked eastward, in the direction of Christ's Hospital; and save from an occasional shout that came up from the Press Yard, no one would guess, when once inside that cheerful, luxurious apartment, how near was all the noise and misery of the great prison. Mrs. Fells was engaged in spinning—a pastime somewhat out of date in towns, but a favourite employment of hers, which she much preferred to the embroidery and tapestry work more generally in vogue. A book lay upon a small table near at hand, and sometimes her eyes rested a few minutes on the open page. A look of quiet, serene contentment was on her face, which changed to a smile of welcome as the door opened to admit her nephew.

"Good-day, Oliver; you come at a good time for me, though a bad one for yourself, I fear. Neither Arthur nor my husband is at home, nor will be till supper-time. They have gone in a wherry to the Tower wharf, on some business, I know not what."

"It is of no consequence, saving that I miss the pleasure of a meeting," answered Oliver. "My business can just as well be transacted with you."

"You come on business, then?"

"Ay, I do. I am charged with a message from my father and brother."

"For me?"

"For you and your husband both; but it seems to me that you will be the person most concerned in the matter."

Mrs. Fells looked up into the young man's face with a look of some surprise. She did not remember ever having received any message from Lord Wakefield before.

"It concerns my sister Maud," explained Oliver. "She has got into sore disgrace at home, and it is thought by many that advantage may ensue from sending her away for a time. You doubtless know the facts of her past history: how she was wedded in childhood to the son and heir of Sir Charles Melville, now himself, if living, Sir Rupert Melville. But my brother was ever set against the marriage and is now most wishful to have it annulled. He argues that, as nothing has been heard of the young man for some time, he cannot be faithful to our sister, or else that he has joined the rebel force in Ireland or elsewhere, and is keeping his movements a secret from

his friends. Doubtless he could, if so disposed, raise money even in foreign countries upon his estates. All this, however, though not improbable, is pure surmise, and Maud will not hear a word spoken of divorce. She holds that her marriage-vow is sacred and binding ; and whilst she is in such a mood there is little to be done, and her presence at the Priory is a source of irritation and discomfort to all. She is like the apple of discord ; and to be brief, my father and brother and sister-in-law desire to send her to some other abode for a while, 'to come to her senses,' as they phrase it."

Mrs. Fells was gazing steadfastly at Oliver ; a look of purpose and interest was on her face.

"And Lady Maud herself ?"

"Well, I have not spoken to her on the subject. At the same time, I have little doubt that she will feel small regret at leaving her home just now. She has set Cottingham at open defiance, and angered Hester, his wife, not a little. Also, one Mr. Humphrey Chalcote is paying her almost open court, and that with the full approval of Cottingham, who ranks as master of the house now. Exile under these circumstances will hardly prove a hardship ; yet I believe it will be best to let the guardians of the wilful young madam continue in the belief that banishment from the Priory will be a sore punishment. Say, good

aunt, do you think that you and my worshipful uncle can be persuaded to extend your hospitality to this erring sister of mine, and keep her a safe prisoner in your gloomy residence of Newgate?"

Grave and impassive as was Oliver's face, there was a flicker in his eyes that betrayed a certain sense of humour, not unobserved by his aunt.

"I can answer both for my husband and myself, and that without hesitation. Any child of his well-loved sister will be welcome to the shelter of our roof, and to a share of whatever we possess, and that for as long as it will please her to remain our guest. Your mother, ere she died, wrote to my husband, expressing a hope that we might one day be better acquainted with her daughter, for whom she felt considerable solicitude even then, lest some trouble should come upon her later on. He promised then, if ever she needed an asylum of refuge, that this house should be her home; and he will not go back from his word. Let her come here when and as she will, a guest, a prisoner, an exile, what you choose, a welcome shall be hers. I will have no hand in attempting to argue her out of her fidelity to even an erring husband; but shelter she shall have, and that for as long as she needs it."

"That is all that will be desired, good aunt," answered Oliver. "The rest, in Cottingham's opinion,

will be effected by the lapse of time. If I may make so bold as to offer a suggestion, be not too lavish to him in promises of good-will. It were better he should continue to think of this house as a prison, and of you and my uncle as jailers; so will he send Maud hither with the more pleasure and satisfaction. Let her once come beneath your care and she will be in small haste, I trow, to leave it; and in less than a year's time she will cease to be a minor and an infant in the eyes of the law."

Mrs. Fells was a discreet woman, who knew when silence was better than speech.

"When shall we expect our guest?" she asked simply and without comment.

"I return to the Priory in ten days' time, and if I have forwarded your consent, I can return with my sister three days later. In two weeks from this date, I think, without doubt, you may look to receive her."

"Her uncle shall journey to Edgeware to meet her."

"It will be unnecessary to trouble him, good aunt. I can accompany Maud myself."

"He would not think it befitting to do less for the child of his loved and honoured sister. The roads are by no means safe, but she will run no risk beneath his escort. I shall count the hours that must intervene before I can hold my dear niece in my arms."

CHAPTER VII.

A JOURNEY.

Autobiographical fragment written by Lady Maud Melville.

I CAN well remember the miserable time that followed for me after that memorable interview with my brother Cottingham, in which I absolutely declined to listen to his proposal for annulling my marriage, and in which I declared that I would never cease to look upon Rupert as my husband, however great the pressure put upon me.

Cottingham was furious, our father quite helpless to protect me, though my mention of mother's dying charge brought tears into his eyes. Hester was angry and offended because I would not be guided by her husband's wishes. She thought that Cottingham must know better than anybody else about everything; which was quite right, I suppose, in his wife. But I was only a sister, and had taken no vow of obedience to him; whereas I had sworn to be true to Rupert, so long as we both should live. But Hester did not

seem able to see the force of this argument, and was so cross and put out that I was afraid to open my lips in her presence. She even succeeded in turning Phoebe and Bessie against me—at least in making them believe that I was a very wrong-headed, obstinate girl. Dear old nurse Gowrie was my only comfort in those days. She stood by me stanchly, and though her support and consolation could only be administered in private, they did me a vast deal of good, and helped me to keep up heart of grace amid all my troubles.

I took counsel with her as to whether I should appeal to my uncle Fells at Newgate for the help and protection mother said he was willing to afford me. But we could neither of us quite make up our mind as to whether the time had really come, and if so, how the step was to be taken ; and whilst we were hesitating, a very wonderful thing happened, which made my way all plain and easy before me.

Hester called me one day into the room where she and Cottingham were sitting, and told me very gravely that it was impossible to go on in this way any longer. My obstinacy and self-will were destroying all the domestic harmony of the house, and if I were resolved not to yield, there was only one thing possible—I must be sent away. I felt half pleased, half frightened at this suggestion, for I had never been from home in my life, and I could not imagine myself in

any other place; but being sufficiently miserable with things as they were, any change held out some promise of amendment. I did not wish, however, to betray any feeling, and I set my face quite hard. Then to my great astonishment and joy (which, however, I entirely disguised), I was told, rather roughly and harshly by Cottingham, that the house of my uncle Fells was to be my destination, and that I was to be another species of Newgate prisoner. Their plan plainly was to shut me up in a place they thought I should greatly dislike, with people with whom they reckoned I should have no kind of sympathy, until sheer loneliness and home-sickness should force me to turn suppliant to come back, when they would be able to dictate their own terms.

They seemed to have forgotten that, after all, Mr. Fells was dear mother's own brother, and therefore likely to be respected and even loved for her sake; and also that my nature was not pliable like my sisters', and that it was not probable I should yield to force. But I said nothing at all, which gave them the idea that I was sullen and obstinate; and I only asked, at the end of the interview, for leave to take Gowrie with me as my personal attendant.

This point was conceded at once. Hester had no love for the old family servant, and was glad to be rid of her; and of course it was out of the question

for me to travel without a maid of my own. I was then informed that Oliver would be home in the course of a few days, and that I was to go back to London with him when he left. His visits to the Priory were never long, save in vacation time. It seemed that Oliver knew something of our kinsfolk, the Fells, though, from his habitual reserve, I had never known this. He had, I discovered, been the agent in this negotiation, which increased my suspicion that Oliver was at heart my friend, though he had never appeared to take my part in any way.

I could have danced for joy as I quitted the parlour, and ran to find Gowrie and tell her the news. She was as delighted as I was myself, and the idea of a sojourn in London was a source of excitement and pleasure to us both. Gowrie had been in the city once, and some of her friends lived there; but that was long ago, before the fire, and she did not know if she would be able to find the familiar place now.

Whilst we looked over my clothes and packed them up, we talked a great deal of our future life; and I think Hester and Cottingham would have been not a little disgusted had they known how delighted we both were with the prospect of our incarceration in Newgate.

The looked-for day arrived at length. It was a bright, mild April morning; everything looked fresh

and bright and dewy as we started. I was surprised how little I regretted leaving all this freedom and beauty for the confinement of city life; but I somehow felt as if the journey to London were taking me one step nearer to Rupert, and I knew that if my relations at home looked coldly upon me, at least my mother's blessing would attend me, for I was following the counsel she had given me, and was resolved to obey her teaching in all points.

Oliver and I rode a little in advance of the coach that lumbered along bearing Gowrie and our boxes. I was fond of horse-exercise, and was fearless in the saddle. I did not know when I should next have a chance of indulging this taste of mine, and had no wish to waste the fair spring day cooped up in the heavy coach. We had a following of a few mounted servants in case the gentlemen of the roads should be about. But I had no fear on that score; I think I should rather have enjoyed an encounter with highwaymen.

I had been as far as Edgware before, but that was the limit of my journeying in this direction hitherto. I tried to get Oliver to talk to me about the relatives to whom I was going, and to tell me about their home and manner of life; but he was silent and abstracted, and I learned very little, though it was not for want of asking questions.

As we rode along the wide, straggling street of Edgeware, and pulled up at the old hostelry where we proposed making a slight halt, I saw at once that there was some unusual excitement going on in the sleepy little town. Evidently some travellers of importance were passing through; for a very smart-looking coach with six horses, all of a colour, stood in the inn-yard, with postillions at their heads, and a good dozen saddle-horses were grouped together not far away, one lovely little Spanish barb being saddled for a lady.

I wondered who these travellers could be, and asked Oliver to inquire; but his answer seemed so strange that I could hardly believe my ears. He pointed with his whip to the door, in which stood two gentlemen, one elderly and one young, both in riding-dress—who, from their appearance and likeness, might well be father and son—and said, “It is our good Uncle Fells and his son Arthur, come to escort you to London, Maud. He said he would meet us here, and I see he has been as good as his word.”

And before I had recovered from my astonishment (for I had pictured my uncle as a good-hearted but common and unpolished person), the elder of the two gentlemen had presented himself at my side and laid his hands upon mine.

"So this is my fair niece who is to be my prisoner, eh? Look well at your jailer, Lady Maud, and say how you like him; for, having once got you safe in his grasp, he will not easily let you go again, as you will find to your cost."

I looked in his face, saw that he had mother's eyes, and as I slipped from my saddle I kissed him on both cheeks.

"You cannot make me afraid of you, Uncle Fells. I heard too much of you from mother. I have wanted very much to know you and my aunt. Will you please make me known to my cousin?"

So then Arthur and I exchanged salutations; and we were led into the inn, where the best fare it had to offer was set before us, notwithstanding that we had as yet travelled but a few miles. My uncle and cousin, however, had ridden that day from London, and were disposed to do full justice to the good cheer. I sat and watched them, and talked as I ate, and found my uncle, though bluff and hearty, a very pleasant man to look at and interesting to talk to. Arthur was more polished, and in his way quite as amusing. He seemed about the same age as Oliver, and I was surprised at the intimacy that appeared to exist between them; for my brother was not addicted to making friends, and had hardly mentioned the Fells at home. I was glad to gather now that he

frequently visited their house, for I was sure he would care for no society that was not to a certain extent enlightened and refined.

When we emerged again from the inn, I saw that our own coach, horses, and servants had all disappeared. And it seemed that the whole cavalcade I had observed in the yard belonged to my uncle, who had brought it to escort me to his home; and the pretty little barb I had so admired was to be regarded as my exclusive property during my visit to my uncle. He was fond of riding himself, and expressed a hope that I should be his companion sometimes. He was evidently pleased that I at once elected to mount my steed, in preference to taking a place beside Gowrie in the coach.

So on we jogged over the rough road in a pleasant, leisurely manner. My uncle rode at my bridle-rein, told me the names of all the villages we passed, and pointed out any objects of interest; but I was more interested in him than in anything else that we saw, till we neared, towards sundown, the great city of which I had heard so much.

We entered, of course, by Watling Street, along which we had been travelling all the way from Edge-ware. I cannot recollect whether it was then, as now, called Edgeware Road, as it neared the confines of the city, but I think it like enough. Then turning to

the left, we proceeded down a road where houses began to appear at regular intervals, until we reached Holborn itself, where for the first time in my life I found myself really in the midst of the roar and the tumult of a great town. I was so excited by all I saw that I could not even ask questions, but only gazed about me with wide-open, wondering eyes. The painted signs swinging over the doors, the cries of the shopmen offering their wares for sale, the crowds of people hurrying along, the number of coaches and horses on the roadway—everything combined to daze and bewilder me; and I was glad that my uncle took the management of my horse into his own hands, for I am sure I should never have been able to steer my way amid the crowd, and I was too much engrossed in looking about me to have any leisure to think of aught else. I had never been in a place larger than Edgeware or St. Albans, and I had not the least conception of what the great city was like. Uncle Fells was much amused at my exclamations of astonishment, and promised me many rides about the city to see its places of interest when once I had settled down in my new home.

We were now drawing very near that home. A large, solid, and handsome gateway loomed up before us against the sunny sky; the western sun shone full upon it, and my uncle said in his quick way, half

humorous, half grave, "You see your prison-house before you, Lady Maud: that is Newgate."

I had heard of Newgate many times in my life, and shivered involuntarily. I could not but try to picture the feelings of the hundreds and thousands of wretched beings who had approached that fine structure before, knowing it to be their destination—a place which they would only leave perhaps for judgment and for death. And surely many hapless men who entered those gloomy walls were as innocent of any crime or misdemeanour as I was myself—the victims of circumstantial evidence or of some malicious plot; and once incarcerated there, what chance was there of their establishing their innocence, when denied access to their friends and supporters, and surrounded by cruel jailers and tyrants? I did not know much of the ways of the prison or the working of the criminal law, but I had heard enough to make me shiver as I approached the historic spot so closely connected with punishment and crime. Could I ever be merry, happy, and careless again, living within sight and sound of the groans and tears and wretchedness of hundreds of fellow-creatures?

I suppose my face must partly have betrayed my thoughts, for my uncle looked at me and laughed a little.

"Courage, fair niece, courage! What! does your cheek blanch at the very sight of prison walls? Ah

well, ah well! you are but young and tender now; you will toughen and roughen with time. Never fear, my wench; in a week's time you will forget your proximity to the prison, and be as gay as a young lark. Newgate walls are strong and thick; they let no sounds through." And then we halted at the gate, and Arthur came to help me to alight.

An ill-looking man, in the dress of a jailer, approached from under the gateway to speak to my uncle. I shrank from him instinctively, and was glad to be led by my cousin into the curious but very beautiful and comfortable house which was to be my home for so many months. I had had no previous experience of the luxury that surrounded me now; it was far greater than anything I had ever known at home. I wondered what Hester would say if she could see the rich hangings and soft carpets, that must have been brought in ships from far-off lands. I began to understand that my uncle must be a wealthy man, and one, moreover, not afraid to expend his wealth in a solid fashion. But when Arthur opened the door of an upper room and said to some one inside, "Mother, I have brought you my cousin Maud," then I forgot all else in the sudden wave of gladness that swept over me in seeing again a gentle, tender, loving face, that at once recalled to my heart the sweet name of "mother."

I think my aunt and I loved one another from the first moment of meeting. I learned later on that she had been a little nervous at the idea of receiving to her house a girl who had been brought up in a different world from hers, and who ranked as an earl's daughter ; but that feeling did not last many minutes after my arrival. When she took me up more stairs, and into a curiously-shaped bed-chamber that was to be mine (with a room for Gowrie beyond, which opened close upon the back staircase), and hoped in gentle, half-timid tones that I should be comfortable and feel at home, some instinct prompted me to put my arms about her neck and say,—

“Dear aunt, I am so pleased, so happy to be here with you ! I think it is passing kind of you to be willing to have me.”

And then a sweet, tender smile beamed over her face, and she pressed me in her arms, saying,—

“Dear child, I am glad from my heart to welcome you here. I have always longed for a daughter, though it has not pleased Providence to bless us with one. You will be like a child to us whilst you stay.”

And then I saw in that kind face a dim likeness to mother that made my heart bound, and enslaved it from that moment forward. They were not really alike, of course. Aunt Fells was a much homelier woman than mother had ever been, though by no

means lacking in a native gentle dignity ; and she had not mother's beauty, or grace, or loftiness of bearing. There was no likeness in feature, but there was some in the expression of the eyes and in the measured tones of the voice. I felt that very soon I should be able to speak to my aunt fully and freely of all that was in my heart ; and that intuition was a source of unmixed pleasure.

When Gowrie came up my aunt spoke to her very kindly, and she stayed with us whilst I exchanged my riding-dress for one more suitable for the house ; and then she conducted me downstairs to the withdrawing-room, where she generally spent her time, and where I had first seen her.

There was a fire of sea-coal, as it was generally called, burning on the hearth, which interested me very much, for we had never burned anything but wood in the country, and I had never even seen coal at home. Arthur and Oliver came in presently, and a little while later my uncle followed ; and then we all went downstairs to a lower room, lighted by lamps (for the daylight was of shorter duration in London than in the country, owing, I suppose, to the murkiness of the air and the proximity of walls shutting out the sun's rays), where supper was spread.

My uncle's face was rather cloudy, and he told us that some insignificant prisoner from the Common

Felons' side had succeeded in making his escape last night. The escape of a prisoner was not a very unusual circumstance, nor in this instance did it greatly matter; but my uncle looked upon it as an evidence of carelessness and laxity that ought not to be, and he had spoken sharply to his subordinate officials as to the necessity for keeping watch and ward in a keen and systematic fashion by night as well as day. The laxity of prison discipline in some points seemed to be a curious contrast to the savageness and harshness that prevailed in others. I learned more of this inconsistency later, when I grew more familiar with my surroundings. Then I was simply astonished that escape from those solid walls was in any case possible, and I think all my sympathy was for the escaped criminal. Oliver asked if he could not be traced and recaptured; but the answer was that he was certain to have got down to Whitefriars by this time, and that he was too insignificant to be worth searching out with a band of musketeers.

Then Arthur turned and explained to me that Whitefriars was a part of the city close to the water, and that it was a perfect nest of thieves, rogues, and vagabonds. Once there had been a house of Carmelite Friars there, where criminals could take sanctuary, and even now debtors could not be arrested within its precincts; but practically it had become a

place of refuge for every class of criminal, and it was such a rookery of ruffians and knaves, that no ordinary official dared enter its narrow streets to attempt an arrest. I wondered that the government permitted such abuses to exist within such a short distance of the very place where they sat to administer the law; but I learned by degrees that there are many things in the world that the wisest of laws have little power to check, and that many evils have to be endured because there seems no present way of curing them.

In the evening several friends of my uncle and cousin came in, and there was a good deal of talk in my aunt's withdrawing-room, not in the least like any conversation I had ever heard at home.

Some of the people (who were all men) came from the coffee-houses, where they had been talking over the latest scraps of news; some from the playhouse in Drury Lane, where they had been watching a play acted.

There was a good deal of excitement, I could see, on the subject of the Abjuration Bill, which was being debated in Parliament at this time. It was plain that a Tory victory was expected, as the Whigs were decidedly declining in influence just now, and the King had plainly intimated that it was by no wish of his that such a test was to be laid upon his people, nor would it be looked upon by him as any disloyalty that his friends should oppose the Bill. I thought, when

these things were said, that the King was sure to be much liked on account of his moderation and justice; but Arthur told me, what I thought very curious, that his moderation and desire to spare his enemies was one of the main causes of his unpopularity. Several Indemnity Bills had already been thrown out, much to his vexation, and there was some belief that he would have great difficulty in getting his Act of Grace through the refractory Houses. The strange thing was that the very people who profited by it railed upon him for it. The inconsistencies of human nature are certainly very strange.

I learned that evening the details concerning Lord Halifax's retirement and renunciation of the Privy Seal, which I had never fully understood, and the subsequent danger from which his readiness and acuteness had saved him. I also heard how the King had suggested his own retirement to Holland, and how that threat on his part had brought about a reaction in his favour. It was strange to think what a great seething world we lived in really, and how little we, only a few miles away, had known what was going on.

When I went to bed that night, with the sounds in my ears of the city that never seems really to sleep, I felt indeed as if a new life had opened out before me.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN LONDON.

LADY MAUD MELVILLE found that her life in the great city of London was a change even greater than she had anticipated. She found herself for the first time in her life treated as a person of distinction, and waited upon and considered in a fashion to which she had been altogether a stranger. In her father's house she had occupied a subordinate position, and had expected or exacted little attention. Daughters in those days were, as a rule, but little considered as compared with sons; and Maud had never arrogated to herself the position of a married woman, or expected to be treated differently from her sisters.

In her uncle's house, however, she found that her will was in a sense to be law, and that she had only to express a wish to find it fulfilled in a marvellous way at the first possible opportunity. She was also treated with all the deference and respect due to an

earl's daughter and a baronet's wife; and although the fact of her marriage was never put forward or thrust into notice, it was, on the other hand, never ignored, as it had been at home, and if any direct question were asked, it was answered with perfect candour.

Lord Cottingham, had he been on the spot to see and hear what passed, might in all probability have been but little pleased at the line adopted by these plebeian relatives; but his request to them to receive his sister as their guest had been coupled with no condition, and worthy Mr. Fells and his wife acted towards her in the manner that seemed to them right, without troubling their minds over anything else.

So Maud was well pleased to be with them, and intensely grateful for their care of her. But perhaps the very fact of being regarded as a wife made her feel more anxious to hear tidings of her husband, to be joined to him whose name she bore, and to put an end, by open union with him, to the false position which she now occupied.

She had not been a fortnight in the house before she had talked over, not with her aunt alone, but with her uncle also, the chances of finding her husband; and had asked, half-smilingly, half-wistfully, whether they could suggest to her any way by which she

might be able to trace him. She felt confident of his fidelity. She was certain that he had written, that his letters had been lost, and that, as she was unable to correspond with him, he had grown weary of the medium of paper, and had resolved to wait till he could meet her face to face. It was also quite possible that the young man might deem it just as well to keep out of the country until things were a little more settled. The rebellion in Ireland had given a handle against many families of known Stuart (or, as it began to be called, Jacobite) leaning, and the young baronet might suspect that he would be but coldly received in a family of which the son and heir had always been his enemy. Politically there was nothing of necessity suspicious or damaging in his absence at such a time, as he might never have heard of the real clemency of the new King. At the same time it would, of course, be a satisfaction to his well-wishers that he should turn up safe and sound, and Mr. Fells promised to make inquiries of all who were at all likely to have heard anything of him or to have crossed his path of late years. His vocation naturally led him into intercourse with many different people, amongst whom some might chance to have been beyond seas at no very distant date. So Maud took heart of grace, made up her mind that this kind, capable uncle of hers would be certain to come upon

some traces of her vanished husband, and in this confidence she gained more of health and spirits than she had known since her mother's death.

She began to make pilgrimages with her uncle or cousin, sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback, to the various places of interest in the great city which had hitherto been merely names to her. She visited St. Paul's, which, having been destroyed in the great fire, was being rebuilt in its present magnificent proportions, under the auspices of Sir Christopher Wren ; and having on one occasion had the honour of an introduction to that immortal man, she made a round of all the many public buildings he had planned and built since the calamity that gave him his unique opportunity, and was struck, as all must be, with the versatility of the genius of a man who could evolve such a multitude of designs and execute them with such skill and promptitude. His wonderful steeples were of course one great feature of his work. St. Mars-le-Bow, St. Magnus, St. Bride, were all visited in turn, as well as the beautiful domed church of St. Stephen. Mr. Fells was greatly interested in architecture, and made an excellent cicerone ; and he never ceased to bewail the fact that the beautiful old church of Grey Friars, where he and his wife were married, had been laid in ruins, although the inner buildings (now the Blue Coat School) had been preserved. He

had many stories to tell his niece of the universal terror inspired by that fearful conflagration ; how the Lord Mayor Bludworth made light of it at first, and then, when he found the terrible hold it had obtained, grew paralyzed with terror, and did nothing. He told her that his own shop and warehouses were in Fleet Street, a little beyond the Bar, and that all through the day of 3rd September the flames were spreading along the street with fearful rapidity. An east wind was blowing, and had been blowing for some time. Everything was dry as tinder, and fires seemed to burst out in advance of the great body of flame, like destructive heralds anxious to announce what was coming upon the doomed city. There were hundreds and thousands of helpless, homeless beings, standing about in abject despair, looking on at the devastation without a thought of checking it. A few active citizens, of whom Mr. Fells was one, were vainly endeavouring to rouse the terror-stricken people into some kind of active helpfulness, when in the gathering gloom of smoke and dust, who should dash through Temple Bar but the King himself, with the Duke of York beside him, and some soldiers in attendance with bags of gunpowder ; and by blowing up and pulling down houses in the track of the fire, its spread was checked in that direction, Temple Bar was saved, and so was the property of Mr. Fells.

Maud's aunt would supplement this story by accounts of her labours of love during the following weeks, when she had had her house full of wretched, homeless people, who had lost their all, and who seemed many of them quite dazed and crushed by the calamity. It was easy to see that Mrs. Fells shared in the feelings of compassion and tenderness towards suffering fellow-creatures that had characterized Lady Wakefield ; and Maud felt certain that if it should be her lot, as her mother had said it might, to forget her own troubles and loneliness in charitable cares for others, her aunt would be able and willing to give her such advice and assistance as would help her to make a beginning.

But just now these sadder thoughts seldom troubled the girl's head. She was enjoying herself as she had seldom done during all the years of her childhood ; for there was something in the stirring atmosphere of the new life congenial to her active temperament, and her thirst for information was gratified almost daily by visits to places of historic interest and to buildings associated with scenes of which she had heard or read.

She went to a play at Drury Lane Theatre, where King Charles II. had fallen in love with the well-known Nell Gwynn, in her character of Valeria in Dryden's *Tyrannic Love*. She was shown the well-

known coffee-houses frequented by her cousin and his friends—"Will's," "Button's," and "Tom's," all in Russell Street, Covent Garden, and famous for the assemblage of wits and literary celebrities who gathered there during the reigns of Charles II., William III., and the early days of Queen Anne.

She visited Westminster and its many historic buildings, and saw in New Palace Yard the spot where the infamous Titus Oates had been pilloried in the previous reign; and entered with a beating heart the Painted Chamber, where the death-warrant of Charles I. had been signed, and where Cromwell had disgraced himself and humanity by his miserable childish jesting with Henry Marten the moment after he had affixed his name to the fatal document.

She rode out sometimes with her cousin to Hyde Park, which was of much larger extent than at present, though, needless to say, in a very different state of preservation; for until the reign of Charles II. the ground had been merely meadows. It was a pleasure to Maud to quit the city sometimes for the freer air of the western suburbs; and Arthur was as pleased as she was to leave the noise and smoke behind, and amble leisurely along in the more sunny and open quarters. He and she were great friends by this time. He was as keenly interested in Rupert's

fate as if he had personally known him, and was pledged, like his father, to make every effort to trace him. She, on her side, was his confidante in the love story that was beginning to interweave itself with his life ; and it was to her alone that he had as yet confided the secret of his attachment to sweet Mary Mackenzie, a Quaker maiden, who visited from time to time his mother's house.

Mistress Mary was all that was good and true, but she had no fortune, and Arthur was doubtful how far his father would approve his choice ; for Mr. Fells, though kind-hearted and generous, was a shrewd, hard-headed, practical man, and might consider that his only child should do better for himself than wed a penniless maiden, however fair of face. So as yet Arthur had spoken of the matter to none ; his cousin was his first confidante. Of course she promised her assistance in as far as such assistance was possible, and forthwith cultivated the society of Mistress Mary, who was speedily recognized as her greatest friend.

Maud had never before made a girl friend of her own. At one time she and her future sister-in-law, Hester, had been thrown somewhat together ; but they had never assimilated, either in taste or in feeling, and the subtle sympathy that is the essence of true friendship had always been lacking. With Mary Mackenzie this element was present, and the girls

took an increasing pleasure in the frequent meetings that were arranged for them.

Mrs. Mackenzie was a widow, and her circumstances were straitened. She lived with her daughter in a lodging off Holborn, about half-a-mile from her friends in Newgate. She did fine sewing and embroidery for the mercers, and added in this way to their scanty provision ; and her daughter was beginning to earn a reputation for the excellence and beauty of her designs. Mary was more skilful with pencil and brush than with the needle ; but as she was able equally to assist her mother by this talent, there was no need to regret the lack of the other. Mother and daughter were fondly attached ; and if on account of their faith (Mrs. Mackenzie and her husband had been brought up rigid Quakers, and the daughter had not dissented from the tenets of her parents) they had suffered anxiety, privation, and a certain amount of persecution in past days, the passing of the Toleration Bill had relieved them from all further fear, and let them live their life more tranquilly than once they had dared to hope in this world.

Mrs. Fells had known Mrs. Mackenzie for many years, and a warm friendship existed between them. She helped the widow greatly by giving her orders for fine needlework, and by making known her talents to friends. Mary's designs were bought up eagerly

by Arthur, in his business capacity, and he would fain have paid her double and treble their value, had not good taste and common-sense withheld him. The Mackenzies were ever welcome to the home of the Fells; but their modesty and retiring feelings kept them from encroaching too much on the hospitality extended to them, so that until the arrival of Maud at the governor's house Arthur's opportunities for meeting gentle Mistress Mary had been but few. It was seldom that the timid Quaker ladies ventured abroad after dark, and the business of the young man kept him absent from home all the earlier hours of the day.

Now, however, with the assistance of Maud, who made an able partisan, and with the lengthening of the daylight as summer approached, a good deal more was effected than had been possible before. Maud, who had always possessed some talent for drawing, professed herself eager to acquire from Mary such amount of her skill as could be gained through the medium of lessons, and her uncle, hearing something of this wish, offered liberal remuneration to the girl for a course of instruction to his niece. These lessons were to take place at a rather late hour in the afternoon, and Mrs. Mackenzie was to join the party at supper, and walk home afterwards with her daughter, before it should be dark. As a matter of fact, Arthur

always contrived an excuse for walking back with them, but no significance was attached by his parents to this simple act of courtesy on his part.

These lessons in drawing were a source of great pleasure to Maud, not simply from the love of the art itself, or from the pleasure of doing a kindness to Arthur, but because she greatly enjoyed the conversation that went on between her aunt and her friend whilst she was busy over her design or picture. Mrs. Fells always sat with the girls, at their own especial wish, and if Maud was too much engrossed to take an active share in the conversation, her ears were always attentive to what passed, and it often seemed to her that a new field of interest was opened to her by the talk she heard at such times.

One conversation in particular made a distinct impression upon her, and was destined to lead in a short time to important results. Mrs. Fells had been entertaining the two girls, somewhat to the detriment of the lesson, by some account of the terrible plague year that had never been forgotten by those who had lived through it, and which never failed to exercise a species of fascination upon all who learned its incidents even from hearsay. When, however, these incidents were related by an eye-witness, they became yet more absorbing, and Maud had listened in breathless attention to the terrible tale so quietly related.

At the time the plague broke out, the Fells were living in Fleet Street, and they were amongst the few who could easily have done so that did not leave the city when it was so fearfully smitten. At that time they were childless, and had no one to consider but themselves ; and Mr. Fells was one of those tough, determined men who despise a panic, and who had the true British instinct of standing to his post at all costs. He was then a member of the corporation, and was one of the oldest seconders of the brave Lord Mayor Lawrence, who likewise stood his ground in the face of all perils, and with Earl Cavan and General Monk, then Duke of Albemarle, did noble service in trying to stay the progress of the malady, and in providing for the wretched prisoners in infected houses.

The tales Mrs. Fells had to tell of what she witnessed during those months of sultry heat in the plague-stricken city were of a kind to haunt the memories of the hearers for days to come ; but as so much on the subject has been handed down by contemporaneous writers, it is needless to quote her words here. It was the conversation that followed upon the description of the plague year which has a real bearing upon our tale.

“ I suppose you have never had any cases of the plague in Newgate ? ” Maud asked, as she bent once more over her work.

“Never in our time, which has been but brief, however. Besides which, I think the plague, in its old form, is greatly dying out. We seldom hear of it now. It seems as if the great fire of the year following burned the germs of it out from the city. It may be that that seemingly so great calamity was a merciful interposition of Providence to save us from the horrors of a second outbreak.”

“It seemeth so to me, dear friend,” said Mary, who, true to her training, never addressed any one by a title, and generally spoke to her elders after this fashion. “Mother, who likewise well remembereth that sad time, albeit not dwelling herself in the city, hath often said the same. There ever seemeth something terrible in an outbreak of sickness that sweepeth away by hundreds and thousands. I have wondered sometimes what that jail-fever can be like that hath so often broken out in the walls of this prison. My father, who lay many months here for conscience’ sake, long years ago, hath often told us of its ravages. How is it within the walls now? Hath it likewise disappeared? We have heard nought of it of late.”

“Nor have I very much,” answered Mrs. Fells. “I believe there are always some cases within the prison, and some deaths take place there from that or

other maladies not unfrequently. But I know not much of what goes on there. My husband does not desire that those he loves should feel too much their close proximity to so much that is evil and wretched. When he comes back from his official duties within the prison walls he likes to forget or to put aside all thoughts of what he has witnessed there. He prefers that I, and those with whom he spends his evening hours, should know little of the scenes amid which much of his time is of necessity passed. Therefore, although I live within the precincts of Newgate, and my husband is its keeper, I know little of what goes on within its walls."

"I can well understand that feeling on the part of Thomas Fells," answered Mary thoughtfully; "and yet, methinks, were I his daughter, I could not be content to be left quite so ignorant of what was passing there."

"What good would such knowledge do you, my dear? It would but make you unhappy."

"Nay, dear friend, not unhappy, unless I were willing to stop short with knowledge, and that I think I should not be."

"What now would you wish, dear heart?"

"I should wish, when I heard of some poor wretch smitten down with mortal sickness, to visit him in his dungeon-cell with words of holy consolation from the

Word of God. I should wish to minister, in as far as I might, to the needs of the body, but far more to preach repentance to the erring soul, that it might not go into the presence of its Maker with its sins black upon it. Methinks I could never live in peace amid so much of suffering, sickness, and sin, without trying to do some little office of love for the sufferers. 'I was sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me'—'Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

Mary was silent then, and both her listeners fell into a deep reverie.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRISON.

Autobiographical fragment written by Lady Maud Melville, treating of her residence in London.

I HAD been for many months a guest beneath my uncle's roof before it ever occurred to me, in the light either of a duty or a pleasure, to take any interest in the gloomy prison buildings of which he was keeper, or in their miserable occupants. At first I used to look down with a sense of shuddering compassion if I chanced to see from the window the arrival of some doomed wretch at the grim portal. But I grew used to these arrivals in the course of time, and ceased to trouble my head much about them; and my uncle's plan of silence at home respecting the details of his daily life helped more than anything to keep at a distance any feelings that one might have expected to experience in such a place. I knew, no doubt, that scenes were enacted almost under our eyes that would have frozen my blood with horror had I seen them. There can be no doubt that luckless creatures were

whipped at the cart's tail frequently from Newgate to Tyburn during those sunny summer days ; yet we never knew it, still less saw anything of the terrible procession. My uncle, without appearing to do so, always contrived that his wife and niece should be kept out of the way of anything disagreeable or painful ; and the consequence was that I almost forgot my close proximity to the jail, or if I thought about it at all, fancied that there could not really be much misery there, or it must of necessity come to my ears.

In the early days of my visit my cousin Arthur had offered once to take me over the prison ; but I had shudderingly declined, and the offer had never been renewed. For many weeks, and even months, I had so many interests to occupy my mind that I had no leisure for thought of a serious kind. I was enjoying myself more than I had ever done before ; and although I had been used all my days to a free country life, I found nothing really irksome in the greater restraint and confinement of town.

One source of my present happiness was the kind interest taken in me and my affairs by my uncle and aunt Fells and my cousin Arthur, and the promise made by them to do all that was possible to discover Rupert, and put an end to the separation that was becoming so painful to me. My uncle, though adverse to the cause of the Stuarts, was no bigot, and he

agreed with me in thinking that it was altogether premature to condemn my husband as a rebel until he had come forward to speak for himself. My aunt and he both agreed that, in any case, my duty was towards him whom I had wedded, and they believed that my influence would go far to win him back to the "right side," even should his instincts have led him on the other tack previously. My residence in London and my increased knowledge of public affairs had led me to be a far warmer admirer of King William than I had ever thought to be, and had taught me that to place any kind of faith in the word or character of James was altogether hopeless and futile. His restoration must mean misery and war for the nation, and an overthrow of the constitution that was being reconstructed on a basis of greater liberality and enlightenment. It is true that I only heard one side of the question ably argued in my uncle's house, but after-experience has led me to endorse the convictions to which I was led as being sound and true.

I sometimes wondered what Cottingham and Hester would have thought if they had known how well I was enjoying my exile, and how little our worthy kinsfolk were playing into their hands; but they never came to see me, even when they were in town, and Oliver might always be trusted to keep his own counsel.

(854)

The only time I saw my father and eldest brother, during my long stay in London, was at Lord Halifax's house, whither I was taken one day by Oliver, to be presented to his second wife, whom I had never seen. It seems that this lady was a rather intimate acquaintance of Hester's. Before her marriage Lady Halifax had been Mistress Gertrude Pierrepont, niece of the first Earl of Kingston, and although older than Hester by many years, had seen a good deal of her. I understood from Oliver that it was by her wish I was brought to see her. She had heard something of my history, had been pleased by what she termed the romance of it, and had expressed a wish to see me.

At this time Lord Halifax was living in retirement, but it was known that the King and Queen were well disposed towards him. The King was away in Ireland, and the burden of the government was resting mainly upon the Queen in his absence. It was whispered in many circles that she would have liked Halifax at her side then, and the thought was doubtless pleasant to his vanity and loyalty.

Him I knew pretty well; and I had seen the first Lady Halifax more than once in past years. This second lady was, however, quite a stranger; and yet I felt marvellously at ease with her from the first. I believe I was a pretty girl in those days; and during my residence at my uncle's house I had been accus-

omed to meet and talk with men of wit and culture, and was fairly well versed in all the topics of the day. I even ventured to exchange a retort or two with my Lord Halifax, who was, as all men know, a man of great and ready wit ; and his wife seemed pleased that I was not afraid of answering him back. There were not many people there, for it was but a small reception, and I enjoyed myself very much. I think Cottingham and Hester inferred from my pleasure at being in this society that I was growing very weary of my residence at my uncle's house ; but they did not say a word to me on the subject of a return home, for which I was very glad. I should have been pleased to see Phoebe and Bessie and the dear Priory House again ; but I did not really wish to leave London, and Cottingham and his wife waited for me to solicit the favour of being received back.

Before I took my departure Lady Halifax was graciously pleased to hope that she should see me again before very long. She was going away into the country for a while, but she intended returning before the winter, and "threatened" to come and visit me in my prison. She sent me away with the pleasing idea that she really liked me.

I have said all this because, as will hereafter be seen, this friendly good-will on the part of Lady Halifax was to be of great use to me later. But

now I must get on with the main thread of my story.

The young are prone to impatience. When I had come to my uncle's house four months ago, and had received his promise to try to discover tidings of my husband, I had been filled with hopeful confidence that he would soon succeed in doing so ; and now, because the summer was waning without the least item of news having been discovered, I began to lose heart and grow strangely depressed and troubled. My uncle laughed when I looked melancholy, and told me that the wonder would be if he *had* found anything out at so early a date ; but to my impatience the time seemed endless, and I began to ponder upon what my life would be like if I remained always in doubt as to my husband's fate. I remembered my dear dead mother's words about losing sight of one's own troubles in care and sympathy for the sorrows of others, and wondered if it really would be possible to do this, and if so, how one could begin. And then, somewhat about this time, my dear friend Mary Mackenzie, the Quaker maiden, spoke words about the duty of visiting those sick and in prison at our very gates, and I could not get these words out of my head.

I do not think at first that I felt any real disposition towards a charitable work, but I began to feel a void in my life, began to see that I might have to live

alone in a strange fashion—a wife, and yet not a wife—a woman to whom the ordinary joys and cares of wifehood were denied, and who could not take fresh vows upon herself in ignorance of the fate of him to whom she was bound. I began to understand that my mother had foreseen this possibility for me, and had tried to prepare me for it; and I felt on my side an earnest wish to follow her counsels and to do what was right, and try to be like her as far as it was possible.

I think it was probably the effect of a good deal of thought, combined with the recollection of the teaching received long ago and of the words spoken by Mistress Mary, that led me, one day late in August or early in September, to ask Arthur to fulfil his promise and take me over the prison—at least into such parts as he could obtain entrance to.

He looked at me searchingly as he replied, “I will take you anywhere you have a mind to go, fair cousin, and a little gold or silver key suffices to unlock all doors in Newgate; but, tell me, why this change of purpose? A few months back you could not be prevailed upon to venture there.”

“I had so many other things to see then. Now I would fain know somewhat of the prison.”

“It is soon learned, though perchance not so speedily forgotten. You had better have gone in May than now.”

“ Why so ? ”

“ Because the Act of Grace emptied our wards and cells of political prisoners, and gave us more breathing space. Since the King’s departure for Ireland, plots have teemed on all sides, and our jails have become crowded to suffocation. Newgate is not a pleasant place under these circumstances.”

I felt an impulse of recoil, and almost wished my words unsaid. Had my desire to visit the prison been dictated by feelings of idle curiosity alone, I verily believe I should have drawn back then ; but another motive was at the bottom of the impulse, and I held to my resolve.

“ Come then,” said Arthur ; “ no time like the present, and the daylight is not yet gone. We will visit by it such places as are in any way benefited by the presence of the sun. You had better shroud yourself in a cloak and conceal your features beneath a hood. My father might perhaps prefer that your face should not be too easily discerned. It might be well, too, for good old Gowrie to accompany us.”

Gowrie was surprised at this last freak on my part, but by no means averse to accompanying me. She had some natural curiosity on the subject of the prison and prisoners, and less fear of being sickened and repelled than I had.

We both muffled ourselves in long, ample, black

cloaks with hoods, and joined Arthur, who conducted us beneath the gateway to the porter's lodge.

Whilst a short conversation went on between my cousin and two men there, I looked about me, and saw through a door the interior of another room, in which seemed to be stored manacles and fetters of many weights and sizes.

"Do prisoners wear those?" I asked in a low voice of Arthur, as he turned away with some keys in his hand. He nodded.

"Most of them are clapped into irons when they first arrive; but if they have money, they can purchase immunity from heavy fetters. I believe a few shillings will do it in most cases."

"It seems very wicked."

"What, fair cousin?"

"Why, that poor creatures should be ironed only to extort money from them, when there is no reason for it. I wonder my uncle allows it."

Arthur smiled slightly.

"My father has had enough to do trying to rectify more crying abuses than that. It will take greater power than he will ever have to free Newgate of tyrannous customs."

It would be impossible, without tedious descriptions or plans that I am not clever enough to draw, to give any adequate idea of our tour through the prison;

and, indeed, though I became better acquainted with its ins and outs later on, I had only a very vague idea of the position of the different parts upon my first visit.

Roughly speaking, the prison was divided thus: the Master Debtors' Side, the Master Felons' Side, Common Side for Debtors, Common Side for Felons, Press Yard, and Castle; each of which divisions contained various wards and halls.

The Castle was the best part of the prison, and only prisoners who could pay handsomely for the accommodation were lodged there. It comprised rooms on the ground and three upper floors, and an exercising yard; but I was never much interested in the occupants of these quarters, who seemed little like prisoners, and spent their time in drinking and rioting, careless of all but the pleasures of the moment.

There was a chapel on the topmost story (to which I went afterwards several times on Sundays), and in addition to the large wards and halls, a number of separate cells, "condemned holds" (many of which, I found out later, lay actually under my uncle's house) and independent rooms, to which Arthur took us—the Bilboes Room, the Press Room, and Jack Ketch's Kitchen—which I wished afterwards he had passed over, for I was haunted by horrid thoughts and recollections for many nights after. Bilboes Room was used as a cell for refractory prisoners, and was fur-

nished with Spanish bilboes, which were bars of iron with fetters attached, to which the wretched victims were manacled. The Press Room was the one in which the frightful sentence of pressing to death was carried out upon such prisoners as refused to plead ; and Jack Ketch's Kitchen was used for the horrible purpose of boiling the heads and quarters of such criminals as were after death to be exposed on London Bridge or elsewhere ; for after being parboiled with certain proportions of bay-salt and cumin, the birds did not touch them, and they resisted longer the action of the weather.

I do not think my cousin knew how terrible and sickening all these things seemed to me. He was so well used to think and speak of such horrors that he had lost in some sort the sense of their terror. He took us to these empty rooms as a sort of preparation for what we had to see in other parts of the prison. Here all the terrors were of an imaginary kind at the moment ; afterwards what we were to see was very real.

When we approached the wards which were occupied by prisoners, a jailer accompanied us. I was told later on by my cousin that one of my uncle's most important acts of reformation was to introduce one or two respectable men among the ruffians who had hitherto had sole care of the prisoners. He could not

change or dismiss the whole staff as he would have liked, but he had been able to rid himself of one or two of the worst, and replace them by men of a less degraded stamp. The one who attended us was of my uncle's choosing, and seemed as well disposed and humane as could be expected of any one of his class and calling.

I find it impossible adequately to describe the strange sights I saw that day. I was taken into great wards where debtors, or felons, as the case might be, were crowded together like sheep in pens, packed so close that the marvel was how they managed to exist at all. Some of the occupants of the wards, as I afterwards learned (particularly on the Debtors' Side), were visitors not prisoners, and left at nightfall, and others were wives and children, who voluntarily followed husband and father to jail, having no other place to go to. The atmosphere of these places was quite terrible. I particularly remember one room on the Common Debtors' Side, called "Tangier," into which I really could not go, the air was so foul. It was a marvel how human creatures could live penned up in such a place; and yet my own luxurious home was not a hundred yards away. It all seemed like a terrible dream. I began to wish I had never come. I felt as if I should never get the horrid sights and sounds out of my head again.

I do not know whether the conduct and appearance of the prisoners made it more or less terrible. I saw little appearance of misery upon the hardened faces of the criminals, though now and again a pair of wistful eyes would seem to shine upon me out of a dark corner, in a way that brought a dimness before my vision. But for the most part there was a look of dare-devil hardihood and defiance upon all faces. The men were drinking, when they had money to spend in that way, and playing cards and dice, laughing, swearing, and shouting, as if in a place of public amusement rather than in a prison ; and I heard that the conduct of the French prisoners in their ward was even worse ; but Arthur did not take me to that room, on the uppermost floor, as he said he did not wish me to be too much sickened.

When I asked him where the sick amongst the prisoners were lodged, he said that there was no separate accommodation for them. In all the crowded rooms into which we had looked, there would be some amongst the occupants sick of ague or fever of various kinds. His father had made some attempt to move out of the crowded wards any prisoner who appeared in a critical or dangerous state ; but it was impossible, in the overflowing condition of the prison, to carry out any real or systematic reform, and even if removed from the noise and tumult of the wards, the patients

were little better off in the damp cold cells that were the only alternative. It might lessen the danger to the others for the sick to be removed, but the benefit to the sufferers themselves was of doubtful value.

The jailer who accompanied us said that he had managed to secure one decent room for the sick, which was always full to overflowing ; but the underground cells were always reserved for the political prisoners that came in by the dozen ; and if they arrived in good health, the damp and the bad air, and the privations they endured, rapidly developed ague, or jail-fever in some form or another. Yet it was impossible to put them elsewhere, the whole place was full to suffocation. I was growing sick at heart with the realization of all this misery and destitution. The faces of the half-starved debtors seemed indelibly stamped upon my memory ; and now there were thoughts of the sick and suffering, immured in underground cells altogether unfit for human habitation, with nothing to alleviate their afflictions, with none but hard coarse jailers to visit them or minister to their wants. Could nothing be done ? I had heard Newgate spoken of in old days as a " hell upon earth," but the phrase had borne little meaning to my understanding ; and since I had been living in ease and luxury within the prison precincts, I had begun to look upon all such statements as a species of fabrication.

Now my eyes were rudely opened. I had seen sights and heard sounds that I felt would haunt me to my dying day. It seemed impossible to return to the warmth and beauty and ease of my uncle's house whilst so many fellow-creatures were enduring such misery and privation. I felt oppressed and stifled, nevertheless I did not want to go yet.

"Can we not do something for the sick prisoners?" I asked of Arthur. "Can we not go to see them? Gowrie would know what would be good for them; she is an excellent nurse."

He looked at me with some attention.

"I think you have seen enough for one day, fair cousin; Newgate has blanched your cheek whiter than I have ever seen it. I forget that you are an unseasoned vessel. You had better come away now."

"I do not want to come away. I want to go and see the sick."

My cousin hesitated a moment, and then turned and spoke aside with the jailer. Presently he returned to us.

"You can visit the room where some six or eight sick debtors lie, an you will," he said; "although I doubt if my good father would quite approve, lest you should take the infection of sickness away with you. For my own part, however, I do not think it often attacks those in good health and properly nourished,

else you should not go at all. It is out of the question that you should visit the underground cells. Political offenders are more straitly guarded than common debtors or felons, and the places are too noisome and rat-infested for you to descend to them. Moreover, the keys are not with this fellow, and I would not have you go thither at any cost. Methinks you have seen enough as it is."

I suppose some of the horror and compassion I experienced must have betrayed itself in my face, for Arthur looked dissatisfied and in haste to be gone, and I think he half repented taking me into the prison at all. He did not, however, go back from his word, but signed to the man to lead on. He conducted us up some stairs, and along one or two corridors, to a better kind of room than any I had entered as yet. It contained some eight or ten rude beds, upon most of which poor, sick wretches were lying, whilst two, more wan really than the others, sat crouched over a handful of fire. For though the season was not far advanced, the thick stone walls of the building and the scarcity of sunshine made it always a cold place, and a morsel of fire was one of the first luxuries the miserable captives tried to secure, if they had the good fortune to receive any money.

These sick men were all debtors, and there was no objection made to their receiving gifts, either in money

or kind. I therefore took a gold piece from my pocket, and gave it to the jailer, begging him to fetch up at once a good supply of fuel, and some soup or broth if he could obtain it; and Arthur, though he smiled, made no objection, for I think he saw it would make me happier if I could feel, before I left, that I had done something, however small, to relieve the necessities of some of the miserable beings in the prison. Arthur and I were great friends by this time, and I always helped him when I could in his courtship of Mistress Mary Mackenzie, so he was the last to try to thwart me needlessly in any harmless wish.

Whilst the man was gone, and we were temporarily locked in the prison room, Arthur entered into conversation with the two men by the fire; whilst dear old Gowrie, with that tender skill I so much envied her, moved from bed to bed, smoothing the pillows of the sick, rearranging the scanty clothing, and performing those little nameless offices of love that seem to come instinctively from the true nurse. I followed her as she moved, and addressed a few words to the poor stricken patients. Some smiled and tried to reply; one or two seemed too feeble and vacant to notice our presence; and one mere lad, with bright hair and a haggard face, that was beautiful despite the ravages of disease, looked up with a world of gratitude in his hollow eyes.

I stayed beside him when Gowrie moved on to the last bed—that of an old man, who appeared very drowsy and feeble—and took his wasted hand in mine.

“What is your name?” I asked; “and why are you here? You are very young, are you not, to be in such a place?”

A smile flickered over his pale face.

“I think I shall not be in here much longer,” he said. “I am fifteen, but I have been here so many years that I hardly remember the outside world, and I have nowhere else to go.”

“Where are your parents?”

“Dead, both of them. My father died last February. I did not know but that I should have been turned out; but I was ill even then of the disease that is killing me now, and good Master Fells, to whom many of us owe much, had me removed out of the common ward up here, and here I have stayed in comfort ever since. They never thought I should have lived all these months, when they gave me this bed; nor should I, if I had remained down there, but the coming here and the warm weather gave me a fresh start. I fear me sometimes that Master Fells may have repented him somewhat of his goodness; but I shall not trouble him much longer now. I would I could thank him for his kindness. It is such peace here.”

"I am his niece, and I live with him now. I will take your message ; but how am I to call you ?"

"Eustace Croft is my name, but perchance he will not know it. He must long ago have forgotten his kind act towards a dying lad, the son of a poor debtor; but I have not forgotten him—nor ever shall."

"I will tell him," I answered, relieved to hear such words spoken in this dismal place. "And what do you do all day, Eustace ? Can you read ?"

"Yes ; but we have only one New Testament and one play of Shakespeare's amongst us, and I know every word by heart. Yet I could not read much were it otherwise, my eyes are so easily tired."

"Have you enough to eat ?"

"If the daily dole is served regularly, we do well ; but sometimes it is waylaid and stolen by others, and then we go somewhat short. But it does not trouble me ; I have little stomach for food."

Yet when the jailer brought in a great can of steaming broth I thought his eyes glistened, and he certainly took the basin I brought him with a pleasure that showed him to be in need of some such subsistence. The faggots that, thrown on to the fire, leaped quickly into glowing life, gave evident delight to all the company, and many were the blessings heaped upon our heads as we moved to depart.

"I shall try to visit you again, Eustace," I said, not
(854) 11

quite certain how far I could promise in safety ; "and, at least, you shall have warmth, and food suitable to your wants." His eyes brightened, and he murmured words of gratitude ; but I think the idea of seeing us again pleased him the most of all my promises.

After all, I left Newgate somewhat less sickened and wretched than I had been half-an-hour earlier ; for I had now a definite purpose in my head—a purpose that was to lead to results little dreamed of then.

CHAPTER X.

BAD NEWS.

Autobiographical fragment by Lady Maud Melville continued.

IT was near the hour for supper when Arthur and I and Gowrie returned from our inspection of the interior of Newgate. My aunt and uncle, who had been out on a visit to some friends and knew nothing of our expedition thither, had now returned, and were in the withdrawing-room. I did not join them until I had removed my heavy cloak and changed my dress. I was certain, from the sound of voices I heard in passing the door, that they had company with them ; and though I felt little disposition, after all the sights and sounds of the past hours, to talk and laugh and help to entertain guests, yet I knew that my uncle would be vexed if I did not appear, more especially so if he should chance to learn the cause.

So I let Gowrie dress my hair afresh, and array me in one of my evening gowns ; but I could not coax

the colour back into my cheeks, any more than I could banish from my thoughts the haunting pictures of wild, wicked, haggard, and wretched faces. My head ached, partly with the crowd of pictures that filled my brain, partly from the effect of the foul air I had breathed and the evil odours I had encountered. I could not get out of my mind the idea that it must be some frightful dream—that it was impossible for fellow-creatures to be living in that fearful air, and enduring such terrible privations, only a few yards from the very spot on which I stood. Yet all the while I knew that it was no dream, and that knowledge was what made it all so terrible.

Gowrie talked all the time she was dressing me, expressed her horror at prisons in general and Newgate in particular, wondered any man so good as my uncle could suffer such things to be, and speculated as to the possibility of gaining his consent to do something towards ameliorating the condition of the sick. I think we both forgot to take into consideration the fact that the majority of the prisoners in Newgate were ruffians of the lowest type of humanity, who would make any place a hell upon earth, be the authorities never so careful. We thought mainly of the miserable debtors, who from no actual crime had got into this wretched place, or of the many undoubtedly innocent victims of political plots, who were often incarcerated

weeks and months, and sometimes even years, without being brought to trial, or if tried, condemned to life-long imprisonment on the most insufficient evidence. I learned later on that already great reforms were being attempted in our criminal law (or rather, I should perhaps say that the attempts made were to administer the existing law without the abuses so prevalent in the previous reigns) ; but with the memory of Judge Jeffreys fresh in our minds, we had little confidence in the might of right, nor had his death in the Tower, the previous year, robbed us of all fear that others might follow in his footsteps. Nor was our compassion for innocent victims by any means misplaced ; for the temperate and merciful disposition of the King did not extend to his ministers, and any aggressive or threatening movement on the part of the exiled James was certain to be followed by arrests and executions, which were by no means always justifiable.

It was little enough of all this that Gowrie and I understood, but we knew sufficient to make us profoundly miserable, and I would much rather have spent the evening with her upstairs than have gone to talk with strangers. But I knew my duty and did it, and was in part rewarded by finding downstairs my brother Oliver, who, in this vacation time, had been something of a stranger, and also Mr. Humphrey

Chalcote, for whom I had both liking and esteem. I thought that Oliver looked somewhat more grave than was his wont; but as his manner was ever to be silent and serious, I paid little heed to this. Mr. Chalcote sat next to me at supper, and was very kind and attentive. He was able to give me more intelligence about those at home than I was able, as a rule, to extract from Oliver; and when he had told me all he could think of, he looked at me rather hard and said,—

“Methinks, Lady Maud, it were almost time you returned thither yourself. The air of the city has robbed you of some of your bloom. It is not well for one habituated, as you have been, to the free life of the country to be shut up in a prison home, even so luxurious a prison as this. Say, have you not tired of this long exile? Are you not ready for your recall?” And he looked at me in a fashion so earnest and intent that I knew in a moment what he meant. He had been made acquainted with the reason of my banishment from home, and would fain have learned from me if it had had upon me the effect Cottingham had looked for.

I began to understand then what my brother had hinted at before with reference to this same man, and I felt the hot blood mounting to my cheek.

“I am well content to be here,” I answered with

some haughtiness. "I came here at my brother's desire ; I remain here by my own."

He looked at me still in a steady, sorrowful way, at which I could not take offence, even if so minded.

" You have not heard the news, then ? "

I felt the colour ebb away from my cheek.

" What news ? "

He did not reply ; but after a few moments of consideration, he answered,—

" I have been intrusted with a letter for you from your brother, Lord Cottingham."

" When we go upstairs you shall give it me," I answered, trying to speak firmly, but I was trembling in every limb. What I had gone through earlier in the day was but a poor preparation for any ill news that might be in store ; and some instinct told me that only ill news was likely to come to me in such a fashion. Did the communication I was about to receive concern my husband ? I felt assured that it did.

When we went upstairs again, Mr. Chalcote followed me into a little inner room or recess, divided by a looped-up curtain from the larger apartment, and there he put into my hands a letter addressed to me in my brother's hand.

I glanced at the superscription, and again flushed hotly with indignation. I made no attempt to break

the seal, but held the letter out towards my companion.

“It is not for me,” I said proudly. “You have made a mistake. I know of no such person in the world;” for the letter was addressed to “The Lady Maud Lifford.”

But Mr. Chalcote made no attempt to take it.

“It is meant for you,” he answered. “It was an oversight on your brother’s part. It means nothing. He does not—cannot—attempt to ignore what all the world admits; nor would it be to your advantage for him to do so. Be advised by me: read that letter. It is fitting you should be acquainted with its contents. You will perhaps wonder less then at the passing irritation on the part of Lord Cottingham;” and having so said, he bowed and retired, leaving me to peruse my letter undisturbed.

I almost dreaded breaking the seal, so convinced was I that the news contained would be bad; but at length I conquered my repulsion and unfolded the paper.

“**MY SISTER**,—It is with profound regret that I have to communicate news that may possibly be painful to you, although, after the many warnings you have received, it can hardly be unexpected. It has been now proved, beyond all manner of doubt, that Sir Rupert Melville has been visiting the deposed

King at the palace of Saint Germains ; that he was there for some days or weeks subsequent to the return of the Stuart Prince after his ignominious flight from his army in July, after he had been defeated at the Boyne. When Sir Rupert left for England, which he did at the close of that month, he carried with him treasonable papers to malcontent plotters here ; and as nothing has since been heard of him, there can be no reasonable doubt as to his fate. Either he has been lost in crossing the water, or he has been arrested under a feigned name and cast into prison, or he has made his escape, and must henceforth live in exile ; but this last is altogether improbable, as in that case he would have returned to Saint Germains, which we have ascertained that he has not done. The only reasonable conclusion we can reach is that he is one of those hundreds of guilty wretches who are now crowding our jails, lying awaiting a trial for treason ; or that he has already suffered the extreme penalty of the law. It is more than probable he may be dead already ; there is small chance that he will escape death or lifelong imprisonment. The temper of our judges is little likely to spare the miscreants who are plotting to subvert the good of the State, and threatening the safety of the King. It is not probable that Sir Rupert would divulge his true name, as that would cause the instant

confiscation of his estates, which will now in all probability be secured to you. When matters are a little more settled here, and the lapse of time has further verified our suspicions, some steps can easily be taken to secure to you the property, even though absolute proof of death be lacking. I have little doubt myself that he is dead, or soon will be; but if by any unlucky chance he should yet evade the law, and appear at large, it is better you should plainly understand that you can never be anything to him. The marriage must, in such a case, be annulled by law, for you shall not be permitted to disgrace yourself and your family by a union with a traitor and a rebel. Death will, however, I have no real doubt, rid you of the burden you have carried from your childhood; and it will be well for you to consider seriously the advantages of a marriage that shall be open to none of the drawbacks that have attended the unlucky and ill-judged match made up for you. Our good friend, Mr. Humphrey Chalcote, has, as perhaps you are aware, requested permission to pay his addresses to you as soon as you are in a position to receive them. He has a sincere and disinterested affection for you, and I seriously advise you to give him due encouragement. You may possibly feel some natural sorrow or horror at the probable fate of your childhood's companion; but you must recollect that he has

brought it upon himself by treason and treachery, and rejoice that it was not your lot to be linked in life with such a man. Such affection as you believe you have for him cannot have any real root and can easily be uprooted. When you feel able to endorse these opinions and receive the addresses of our good friend, Mr. Chalcote, I shall be rejoiced to welcome you home; but should you continue to cherish your feelings of a few months back, it will be better you should remain where you are until they have changed. You can charge Mr. Chalcote or Oliver with any message or letter that you please; but, I pray you, bethink you well of the circumstances of the case, and do not let rash pride or stubbornness of disposition hinder you from acting wisely and well.—Yours in brotherly love,

“COTTINGHAM.”

When I looked up from perusing this missive, I found that Oliver was beside me. His face was grave and irresponsive as usual; but I fancied that in his heart he was sorry for me, and that conviction unsealed my lips.

“Oliver, is it true?”

“Is what true, my sister?”

“What Cottingham says in this letter about Rupert? You know all, do you not?”

"All that any one knows."

"And do you believe it? Cottingham is so hard. He always hated Rupert. Tell me that it is not true—that there is a chance—a hope!"

I was growing much agitated. Oliver made me sit down, whilst he glanced through Cottingham's letter, with the contents of which, however, he was pretty well acquainted. Then he looked at me again.

"I am afraid, Maud, that there is little hope of disproving these charges. Undoubtedly Rupert visited Saint Germains, and undoubtedly he crossed to England bearing treasonable papers. So much we have learned beyond all possibility of mistake. He might not really be implicated seriously in any plot—he might only be a messenger; but that fact is likely to be of little avail if he was found with criminal documents in his possession. Had he reached his destination in safety, and delivered up his compromising papers, there seems every reason to believe he would have made himself known to his friends and visited his property, neither of which things has he done. Had he escaped pursuit, and got safe out of the country, he would have returned in all probability to Saint Germains to those who sent him, which he has not done. Therefore the probability is either that he is languishing in prison awaiting a sentence—which is almost certain to be death or lifelong imprisonment

—or else that he has already suffered the former without revealing his identity. Hundreds of prisoners have been made during the past months, and the arrests of traitors have been matters of too common occurrence to attract much attention. He cannot have been pardoned, or he would have appeared in his own character here; and I greatly fear, my dear sister, that you must make up your mind to see him no more this side of the grave. I would gladly do anything in my power to lighten the burden of your sorrow and suspense; but we have no clue to the name he passed under, nor to the port from which he sailed or to which he was bound. To search all the jails in the kingdom would be a hopeless task, nor do I know if I should recognize him again were we to stand face to face. Moreover, he may be dead ere this; and if in confinement, I might obtain no access to him. I fear that there is nothing for it but to accept the worst, and try to bear the thought of his death. A few months may perhaps be allowed to pass before we make up our minds to the fatal certainty; but I fear that is what it must come to at last, and it will be well for you to brace yourself to meet the blow if it should come."

"I think I could bear any blow," I answered, in a dull, mechanical way. "What I cannot bear is uncertainty—suspense."

"If naught is heard of him when months—twelve, perhaps—have gone by, we must needs look upon him as dead. Were he alive, and so near, he would surely contrive some way of informing us of his condition."

"It might not be possible. He might be condemned to lifelong imprisonment;" and I shuddered, for had I not seen for myself the interior of one of our prisons, and that by no means the worst?

"Prisoners can almost always contrive to send a message, if they wish to do so; and Rupert would not be backward, methinks, in either courage or address."

I was silent, turning things over in my mind. My head was hot and confused. I knew not how to think aright.

"Can I say aught to comfort you? Have you any message for me to take back to Cottingham? He will wish to know how you take the news."

I paused a moment, and then answered with some vehemence,—

"Tell him that I will never believe Rupert dead until I have true evidence of it; and that, till it can be proved to me that I am a widow, I will ever hold myself as a wedded wife. To talk to me of Mr. Chalcote is to insult me. I will not endure it. I will remain here, in a house where I am exposed to

no such insult, where I am safe from his interference. In three months' time I shall be of an age to do in all things as I choose ; and you may tell him that in this matter, even now, he is not my master. I belong to my husband, and to none else in the world ! ”

I think Oliver was a little surprised at this outburst. I had gained a good deal in independence of feeling, if not in character, by my residence in a house where I was treated as a person of importance.

“ I will say as much of all that as is fitting,” answered Oliver. “ You do not wish our brother needlessly angered ? ”

His calmness cooled me.

“ No. Perchance I spoke with over-much heat ; but I am hardly mistress of myself to-night. Ah, Oliver, if you could but know how miserable I am you would pity me.”

“ I do pity you from my heart, dear sister.”

“ I believe you do ; but you cannot understand—no one can. Ah, if only mother were alive ! ”

“ I would to heaven she were ! She could ever show us the right way out of difficulties too hard for us ; but I mistrust Cottingham’s wisdom, and our father, alas ! ”—Oliver paused. It was seldom he spoke with such unreserve, but to-day he too was somewhat moved.

“ Oliver,” I said, after a pause, “ it may be well per-

haps that Cottingham should know something of my feeling. If he obtains for me Rupert's estate on the ground that I am his widow—good. I believe that in so doing he would be following the wishes of my husband and his father. But if he tries to enrich me with Rupert's wealth, whilst making provision that in the remote chance of his reappearing in the flesh I am absolved from my allegiance to him, I will have nothing whatever to do with the matter. Until I know, beyond all doubt, that Rupert is dead, I will never consent to hear a word of love addressed to me by another. I can live my life alone, but I will never be unfaithful to my plighted word. I have told him all this before ; if you think it well, you can repeat it. What I have heard this day makes no manner of difference to my duty towards my husband." And having thus explained myself, I withdrew, and went up to my own room.

When alone with my faithful Gowrie, my hardly-tried composure failed me utterly, and I sobbed as if my heart would break, whilst she held me in her arms as though I were a child, and soothed me by caresses and tender words, trying to learn what it was that had upset me. At first she naturally supposed I was merely unnerved by the sights I had witnessed earlier in the day ; but when I was sufficiently composed to tell her all that I had heard since supper time, and to

read to her Cottingham's letter, she saw that I had cause indeed for my tears and sorrow, and she cried with me for sympathy, which did me great good.

She put me to bed that night as if I had been a little helpless child again ; and as thoughts of mother mingled with my prayers, I grew calmer, feeling sure that she was watching over me in this crisis of my life, and praying as only a mother could for her sorely-tried child.

Yet as I lay in silence and darkness, after Gowrie had left me to sleep as she thought, I was visited by hideous and terrible fantasies and visions, which would not be driven away.

Whether I were waking or sleeping, or in a trance-like state betwixt the two, I know not, but it seemed to me as if the face of my husband was before me ; not the bright, blooming boy's face of our sunny childhood's days, but a wan, haggard, troubled countenance, with lines of thought and pain and privation traced upon it—a man's face, not a boy's, yet Rupert's all the while. And the face seemed ever turned towards me from black darkness—was it the darkness of the grave or of that living grave the dungeon cell ? —and the eyes which, though sunken, were yet bright and blue—the dark shadowy blue that I had admired so much in our childhood—seemed ever fixed upon me with a gaze of mute entreaty.

Rupert in prison ! Rupert incarcerated in one of those fearful places such as the one I had that day visited ! Again and again the horrid things I had heard and seen rose up before my spirit, and I moaned aloud in the misery of my over-charged heart. Where was he now, my boyish lover, my childhood's champion, the husband to whom I had sworn constancy and love ? What had they done to him ? What would have been his fate had he fallen into the hands of the officers of the law with papers of a criminal character upon him ? Had they tried, condemned, and killed him ? Had his head—but I could not pursue that horrid train of thought. I would not, could not believe it. I turned my mind to the next alternative. Alas ! there was little comfort there. I thought of Arthur's words, and the jailer's, about the "cells," places so damp, noisome, and rat-infested as to be unfit for me even to visit—places where captives sickened and died without troubling the law to take its course. And I was sure I had heard that Newgate was not the worst of the prisons—that some of the county jails were infinitely worse. What if Rupert were incarcerated in one of those fearful places ? He who all his life had lived in the free open air, who had spent his time in travel, who had known nothing of even the slight constraint that is the lot of woman, or of men who dwell in cities. How would he bear

it? Would he be able to bear it at all? Would he not pine away and die in lonely captivity, if a death of ignominy and shame upon the scaffold did not await him?

And if, as seemed to be the case, he kept silence as to his real name and rank, was it not for my sake that he was thus silent? Was it not plain that he would not bring the name he had given to me into disgrace, or imperil the family property, simply that I might succeed to both without passing under a cloud? Had he declared his identity, he could in all probability have purchased immunity from the greatest hardships of prison life; but then all the world would have known that Sir Rupert Melville lay under a suspicion of high treason, and if convicted, his estates would pass to the Crown, and his name become disgraced in the eyes of the world. He had no one but me to think for or to consider. If things were with him as my brothers believed, it must be for my sake that he kept silence; and if no one else saw the self-sacrifice and nobility of his conduct, I did myself most clearly. If only I could find him! If only he could contrive to send me some word of intelligence! I would raise heaven and earth to procure his liberation—I would rest neither day nor night until I had obtained his pardon. For he was still young, and could not have been deeply implicated; and the temper of

the King was ever merciful and just. Ah! if only I could learn where he was!

But even whilst I thus mused, I felt that all such hope was vain, and a sickening sense of despair took hold of me. It was impossible, utterly impossible, that I should ever learn any tidings of him. Even in Newgate, where my uncle reigned paramount, access to political prisoners was denied me, and it was out of the range of probability that my husband should be there. Yet even as the idea crossed my brain, a thrill as of hope and expectation ran through me. Suppose, suppose—I did not dare to suppose anything so strange, so wonderful, so blissful. And yet—stranger things had happened before in the world's history. Then had not I resolved before to do all I could for the wretched captives in that gloomy place? And if money were needed, had I not abundance at command? and would not mother say that for such a cause I was justified in opening my box? Might it not, after all, lead me to Rupert?

“O Rupert! Rupert!” I cried, holding out my hands in the darkness, “I will come to you if I can—I will—I will! And I believe God will help me to find you!”

CHAPTER XI.

MAUD'S RESOLUTION.

MR. FELLS was not unobservant of the change which just at this juncture came over her well-loved niece. But then she had heard from Oliver of the probable fate that had overtaken her unfortunate young husband, Sir Rupert Melville, and therefore the girl's pale looks and visible abstraction were easily understood.

Mr. Fells, when questioned by his wife, shook his head gravely, and expressed little hope of a happy ending to such a matter. The young man might not in truth have been guilty of more than indiscretion, but the fact of his having concealed about him papers of a treasonable character would be quite enough to brand him as a traitor in the eyes of the law. In all probability he had been captured near to the coast, whither, very likely, intelligence of his arrival would have preceded him, had been incarcerated in some jail or fortress, brought to trial, and executed, like hundreds

of others in similar cases, without exciting the smallest interest in the public mind. The whole country just then was alive with Jacobite plots, and during William's absence in Ireland justice had been administered in very summary fashion. The Irish rebellion had raised alarm in many quarters, and a wave of increasing loyalty had swept in consequence over the kingdom. If the young man had been silent as to his true name and rank, he might have perished, and in all probability had done so, amid the scores of minor offenders whose insignificance caused their fate to be passed over without notice.

And so when, after some days of silence (during which Maud kept much to her room, not feeling fit, either mentally or physically, for playing a part in the family circle), the girl spoke to her aunt upon the subject next her heart, she did not receive the comforting assurance that she had half hoped for.

“It would not be true kindness to stay you with false hopes, my poor child,” said Mrs. Fells, holding the weeping girl tenderly in her arms, “and my husband, who is well qualified to judge on such matters, greatly fears that Sir Rupert must ere this have paid the penalty of his rashness with his life. It grieves me to the ground of my heart to rob you of any lingering hope you may have, yet methinks the truest kindness is to bid you prepare for the worst. Hope deferred

maketh the heart sick, but resignation to the will of Heaven is the best help we poor mortals can have in the hour of trouble."

"If only I could know the truth—even if it were the worst—I could bear it better," sobbed Maud.

"Ay, my child, I can well understand that. The uncertainty is the hardest part of it. But in these dangerous days, it has often been the lot of us poor women never to learn the fate of those we love best."

And presently, after the girl had wept and been a little comforted, she looked up into her aunt's face to say,—

"And if it be so—if I am never to know the truth about Rupert—my life can never be like that of other women, can it?"

Mrs. Fells knew her meaning, and answered gently,—

"I think you will act rightly in taking no new vows upon yourself, though you will find many, I fear, to urge you to do so, who will tell you that your scruples are idle and vain."

"I care not what they say. They cannot compel me, and I will not yield of my own will. But, dear aunt, I shall want some charge, some care, some occupation in life. Mother talked to me of this when as yet I was scarce of an age to understand her. She

told me, if loneliness and sorrow of heart were to be my portion, that in striving to lighten the burdens of others I should find my greatest peace."

"And she spoke the truth, my child. She was a godly woman. You cannot do better than follow such counsel as she gave you."

"That is what I wish to do. I have been thinking of it all these long, long days. Aunt Fells, I want you to help me."

"That will I gladly, if I can."

"I want you to help me with my uncle. I have set my heart upon a scheme, and I know not whether he will approve it. Do you remember some words spoken by Mary Mackenzie one day when we were talking about the poor prisoners here?"

"Ay, my child, I remember them well."

"I cannot get them out of my head. I have been thinking of them for long. Do you know that Arthur took me over a great part of the prison that day when I heard the ill news of Rupert? I cannot get the sights and sounds out of my head. Waking, sleeping, I see and hear. I cannot rest in my bed for thinking of those poor creatures; and now—when it seems as if—Rupert—" and again Maud's voice became strangled with sobs.

When she was calmer again, she went on with a quiet firmness, not without effect,—

" Dear aunt, when I think that here am I, longing to help the needy and tend the sick ; when I know, or think I know, that my husband is, or has been, a prisoner in a jail like this, and that I have a power of entrance there that so few other women could obtain, I do feel then that this, perchance, may be the labour of love that Heaven has sent me to do. Am I foolish or wicked to say this ? I think not. Did not Christ himself say, ' I was sick, and in prison, and ye visited me ' ? He must mean some of us to care for sick prisoners, or He would never have spoken thus ; and if so, why should not I ? I know it is but little, very little, I can do. I know I cannot go into the crowded wards where dreadful men are swearing and drinking, and making the place so terribly hideous with their clamour. I know my uncle would not let me go there. I think I should not have the courage to do so—though, no doubt, even there are to be found poor, sick, timid creatures whom I would fain comfort and assist. But there are other places less bad than those—one room where some sick men lie together—debtors, not criminals ; and there are solitary cells where some poor captives lie sick alone. Might not I go thither sometimes, with good Gowrie to attend me ? It would give me such happiness to be allowed to visit and minister to them."

" I think your uncle would have small objection to

your visiting the debtors from time to time and administering to their needs. I myself, though I go not to the prison, do what I can for the poor women who are forced by need to share their husbands' captivity. These garments which I spin and make are for them; and they have doles of bread from me, and milk for a sick child, if I hear of any such. Debtors are not like criminals of the baser kind, although many of them are brutal ruffians; but their friends have easy access to them, nor does the appearance of a visitor excite speculation or remark. Them I doubt not you could visit and relieve, without let or hindrance, especially such as be sick, for my husband is ever compassionate towards the sick, and would do more for their relief were the power his to use. But I fear me you must content yourself with that good work alone. He will not give you permission to visit those other places where political prisoners are shut up in solitary confinement. It would not be right for him to do so," she added, seeing the look of disappointment that crossed the girl's face. "He is responsible for the maintenance of law and discipline. No one visits such prisoners, save such as are sent from high places to endeavour to entangle them in their talk or extract confession. Moreover, such places are not fit for you to enter. Be content, my child, and satisfy yourself with what can be

accomplished without raising difficulties and doubts in your uncle's mind."

Maud did not perhaps feel as content as her aunt desired, for it was the cells of the political prisoners that exercised upon her so powerful a fascination ; but at least she was wise enough to say no more, and to leave the negotiation in the hands of her aunt, who promised to sound Mr. Fells upon the matter shortly.

Now, the governor of the prison was a kind-hearted man, and very fond of his niece, whose bright ways and unaffected love for himself had made her very dear to him. He had been extremely gratified at the way in which an Earl's daughter had settled down to the homely life of his house. Many months had now passed by without bringing to her any weariness of her present surroundings, and he felt exceedingly pleased and flattered to hear her ask, in her coaxing way, if she might stay a little longer, or if he were getting tired of her. He began to feel towards her as to a dear daughter, only with a dash of respect and admiring deference. He was exceedingly sorry for her just now, and saw the pathos of her position clearly enough. He would have done anything in the world to lighten her grief, or soothe her anxiety, but as he felt it impossible to be sincere and yet consolatory, he had held his peace, and only shown his

sympathy by caresses and kind words on indifferent subjects.

When, however, he heard from his wife of the plan that had come into the girl's head, he raised no objection, as he might possibly have done a few weeks or months ago, and even said that it might be a good thing for her. He did not particularly desire a system of prison visiting from any person connected with his household, as men in responsible positions are constrained to walk warily and avoid all cause for suspicion or offence; and his wife, knowing and understanding his feelings, had been careful to act with great discretion in the matter. But Mr. Fells was becoming more secure in his position with the flight of every month; no scandal of any kind had arisen at this time to affect his reputation, and he was unwilling to allow a slight personal sense of reluctance to stand in the way of the girl's expressed wishes. He did not much believe in her remaining unwedded all her days; but he did plainly see that for some months, or even a year or two, the thought of a second marriage must of necessity be repugnant to her, and he had sense to see that it would be for her benefit and happiness to have some congenial occupation to fill up her time. Girls of rank in those days had not the same field for the expenditure of their energies that they have now, and it was difficult in a place like London to devise

occupation and distraction. If she had a fancy for ministering to the sick in Newgate (such of them at least as it was fitting she should visit), well, he would not oppose the freak. No exception could be taken to her visits to the Debtors' Side, and with that she must content herself.

So at supper, a night or two later, when uncle and aunt and niece happened to be alone (Arthur having gone home with Mistress Mary Mackenzie, who had been spending some hours with Maud), Mr. Fells turned to the girl in his blunt yet kindly fashion, and exclaimed,—

“ So you can't rest content without turning Sister of Charity, eh ?—setting all Newgate topsy-turvy with your new-fashioned ideas ? And what if I say no ? ”

“ Ah, but you will not say no ! ” answered Maud, with the smile, half-arch, half-coaxing, that was familiar enough to the uncle by this time. “ You like to make out that you are a hard tyrant, and keep us in mortal dread of you. But we all know better than to be so deceived. Besides, I know that you are kind to the sick yourself. I have a message of thanks to you from one of them.”

“ Oh, indeed ; and what may that be, pray ? ”

And then Maud told her uncle what the sick lad Eustace had said about him ; and he was pleased to

hear himself well spoken of, although he made light of it, and he ended by putting five golden guineas into the girl's hand.

"It does not do for the governor to be too free with his money, you know," he said with a knowing kind of look. "But you will want something in your purse, if you're bent on playing good Samaritan, and two-pence does not seem to go as far in these days as it did in his time. No, no; no thanks, my wench. I am glad enough to make things a bit easier for these poor creatures. Prison life is but a sad thing at best, except for those who care no whit for anything bad or good, and can jest on the way to the gallows. I ought to be more hard-hearted than I am; but I shall grow seasoned with time, and you, too, if you persevere. Keep to the Debtors' Side. Dobbs is an honest fellow, and is to be trusted to supply anything you order at moderate cost. Do not spoil even the sick. Be wise and moderate in all you do; and if the doing of it gives you any pleasure, why, nobody will be better pleased than your uncle."

So in this easy fashion Maud's way was made smooth for her to do something towards the relief of the sick prisoners. Arthur, when he heard of the plan, laughed at it a little, but said it was a kindly notion, and might do good, if not carried too far. He sent down from the warehouse in the city a bale of

blankets, which the growing severity of the approaching winter made a most suitable and appropriate gift.

Upon the following day, Maud and Nurse Gowrie entered the portal of the prison a second time; and this time it was Mr. Fells who accompanied them to the lodge, and himself summoned the under-jailer, Dobbs, and gave him instructions to admit the Lady Maud to certain parts of the prison whenever she should make application to that effect.

"Will you not come up and see Eustace, uncle?" asked Maud, coaxingly. "I am sure he would be so pleased if you would."

So he let himself be led by her up to the room where the sick debtors lay, and received in off-hand but not unkindly fashion the thanks of the dying lad, and those of several others who had felt it an inestimable boon to be removed from the turmoil and strife of the common ward to the peace and comparative luxury of this room. He had, however, the less gracious task of telling the three patients who had recovered from their sickness that they must return whence they came, and make room for others who needed the sanctity of the retreat more than they. Still, they obeyed with tolerably good grace, finding possibly the sick room a little dull; and the governor accompanied the jailer downstairs, to ascertain who among the sick, always to be found in the

various crowded wards, had better be taken to the vacated beds.

Mr. Fells was in advance of his time in making any kind of attempt to separate the sick from the whole, and he could only follow the dictates of reason and common-sense to a very limited extent. Prison hospitals had never yet been thought of, and the misery of those who, racked with pain and fever, had not a quiet moment all the day through, often not even a bed to lie upon, seemed a matter of small consequence. People who put themselves under the ban of the law must take the consequences: such was the prevailing opinion of those who thought about the matter at all; and the fact that in many cases the only crime was poverty did not appear to alter materially the opinions of the public. Debtors were allowed certain privileges, it is true, but in some ways their case was harder than that of any other class of prisoners. An allowance of food was doled out to felons, but the prison authorities were not always responsible for finding sustenance for debtors. These latter were dependent upon their own resources, the charity of friends, or the doles provided by the citizens. This dole of bread, which was all the really destitute had to depend on, was given out only once in forty-eight hours, so that a poor creature coming in just after the distribution of the dole had to pass two entire days

without food, unless the charity of some fellow-prisoner prompted a gift in money or in kind.

The sufferings of the sick under such a *régime* may easily be imagined, and deaths in the prison were of constant occurrence, and hardly excited remark. An individual here and there might raise a protest as to the shocking condition of the jails, and the state of the wretched captives immured there ; but no popular indignation was aroused. It was not till more than a century later that any real or lasting improvement was made. Howard, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, endeavoured to expose the abuses that prevailed in our jails in his celebrated work, "State of Prisons," and Sir Stephen Jansen helped him by a letter to the Committee then considering the question of rebuilding Newgate, stigmatizing it as "an abominable sink of beastliness and corruption." But even then, when the jail was rebuilt, the grievances and abuses and unsanitary conditions still continued but little ameliorated, and despite the efforts of many private philanthropists, such as Alexander Cruden, Silas Told, and the Justices Fielding and Welch, little was really done to relieve the needless sufferings of the prisoners till the Committee of 1814, and the commencement of Mrs. Fry's celebrated work, which was almost of the same date.

If prison reform was a matter so difficult of achieve-

ment even in a more enlightened age, the state of the prisons at the close of the seventeenth century can be imagined; and if hospitals for the deserving poor were hardly dreamed of as yet,* it was no wonder that sick criminals were not thought worthy of attention and care.

If the case of those whom Maud Melville visited was deplorable and sad, how was it with those other wretched victims in the dark vaults she was not permitted to enter?

In one of the dampest and darkest cells of the subterranean part of Newgate a prisoner had been languishing for many weary months. He had been brought in sometime late on in July, desperately wounded in his valorous attempts to elude the officers of the law, and to protect the treasonable papers that were found upon his person when he had been overcome and searched.

He had been caught in an attempt to land at Blackfriars from a small wherry, which had probably taken him off from some vessel in the river's mouth; but the officers of the law were on the alert, and he had been carried to Newgate and put under close restraint, as a dangerous and turbulent traitor. He gave his

* St. Thomas's, St. Bartholomew's, and Bethlehem Hospital were in existence at this period, but in a very different form from the present. It was not till the reign of George II. that the value of these institutions became really recognized.

name as Robert Moore, but would say not a word as to his own antecedents. He was mute as to the contents of the papers found upon him, nor would he betray the hands from which they had come.

Notwithstanding his wounds, therefore, which were of a sufficiently serious character, he was heavily ironed, and placed in the underground cell in which he languished still.

Money he appeared to have none, so could not purchase for himself any of those immunities from hardship that others of his class generally contrived to procure for themselves. The jailer who had charge of these cells saw at the first glance that this newcomer was a gentleman, and looked to make a rich harvest out of him, as he had already done out of many other political prisoners who had inhabited the cell before him. Those who had private means of their own would speedily pay down the number of guineas necessary to obtain admission to the Castle; for these all had friends who were ready and willing to assist them and keep them there, where they could live in comparative comfort, and receive visits from their kinsmen. It was inconceivable that any man, who bore himself as bravely and looked as courtly as this young gallant, should be without money and without friends; and the jailer—a hardened fellow of the name of Fox—made many attempts to get him to

purchase an amelioration of his miseries by an appeal to his friends. But he was always met by the quiet, resolute answer, "I have no friends; I can give you nothing;" till Fox, growing angry at his contumacious obstinacy, resolved to let him taste the full bitterness of life in Newgate.

His cell was bare of any kind of furniture; even the bed was but of stone. All the light that entered was a sickly gleam through a grating high up in the wall. Moisture trickled down the walls and lay in pools on the floor; rats held high carnival during the greater part of the twenty-four hours; and even through the sultry days of August the place was cold as the grave. Any kind of exercise was of course entirely out of the question, owing to the weight of the fetters attached to his feet. It would have puzzled a strong man to walk about in such manacles, and Robert Moore had entered his prison grievously wounded, and in sore need of a leech's skill. It is true that, by the orders of the governor, his wounds had been dressed and the bleeding stopped before he was taken to his cell; but once there, no further attention had been paid to him, and he had been left entirely to the tender mercies of Fox, who speedily thought fit to neglect him altogether. He merely brought the daily ration of bread and water, at such time as suited him, and went away without a word

to his sick and fevered captive. He had no patience with those of the "quality" who were so outrageously obstinate. The harsher he made this young man's captivity the more likely was he to think better of his decision, and resolve to appeal to his friends. The man never doubted for a moment that his prisoner had wealth at his command, and friends who would help him if he chose to make application; and he did not hear the words that the youth often spoke alone, in the solitude of his cell, as he lay in pain and weakness upon his wretched bed:—

"It is better so—better so; better to die unknown and quickly, as I must do here, than to linger out a wretched existence in jail, or suffer at the hangman's hands. It is useless to hope for mercy, though Heaven knows I am innocent of any treachery to King William. They swore to me that the papers were of no political significance, but were simply of a private and family kind; and but that they bid me use secrecy, as coming from Saint Germain, I should never have thought of seeking to elude observation. Well, if they have betrayed me, I will not betray them. I know nothing, and I will reveal nothing. Whatever happens, I must die; and I will die like a man. Yet I would fain be spared the ignominy of a public trial and execution. Long as I have been away, I might perchance be recognized by some who knew me in

past days, and disgrace, poverty perchance, be brought upon my sweet child-bride, my lady-love, my own dear wife. Ah, Maud! Maud! would that I could see you once more, hold you just once in my arms, and kiss your sweet face ere I die! But it must not be. Who knows that she would come to me, even if she knew; and I will never bring such sorrow upon her. I will contrive (I know a way) to let her know that I am dead, yet to hide from her the manner of my death. At the last I will contrive a message to my good friend Howard, who knows our history, and will do as I beg him; and she will think I died in foreign lands. She will be free, and she will be wealthy: God grant she may be happy too! I think it cannot now be long ere I leave this place for ever. I grow weaker day by day, and winter is nigh at hand. My wounds will not heal, the fever will not leave me. I, too, shall find freedom and release; and may God in His mercy grant me at the last His pardon and peace!"

CHAPTER XII.

FOUND.

Autobiographical fragment by Lady Maud Melville.

WHEN I got my uncle's consent to visit some of the sick prisoners and do something for their relief, I was greatly pleased and comforted ; not simply from compassion for their miseries and a wish to help them, but because I was aware of a great blank in my own life, which it seemed to me could only be filled by some work of a kind that must distract my thoughts from the sorrows of my own lot.

My dear mother had always brought me up to think and care for the sick and needy, and in a fashion I had been pleased to do this ; but now, with so heavy a load at my own heart, there was fresh meaning for me in any office of love undertaken for others, and it seemed to me that no work could have been found so appropriate as that of ministering to sick prisoners.

For no one doubted now that my husband, if yet

alive, was in some dismal prison, and likely only to leave it for the gallows. I never entered the gloomy precincts of the jail without a shudder of horror at my Rupert's probable fate. I never knelt at prayer, morning or night, without imploring a blessing upon him, and asking that it might be God's will to spare him and restore him to me once more. If my love towards one from whom I had been so many years parted had cooled somewhat during the years of my girlhood, it had sprung up into new and passionate life the moment I heard of his peril and danger. I loved him now with all my heart; and could I but have learned where he was, even though it were the lowest dungeon of the worst of prisons, I would have flown to him, and implored to be permitted to share his captivity. I thought of him by day, and dreamed of him by night. Sometimes I felt as if my own great love must conquer all obstacles and draw me to his side.

And the spell of the prison fell upon me, if such an expression can be understood. I think that any persons who go amongst the sick and miserable to try to do them good will understand what I mean when I talk of such a spell. I felt as if I wanted always to be there. I could no longer think much about the things I had thought so interesting once. I cared less about walking or riding out with my

uncle or cousin, less about the amusements they provided for me, less about the talk of the clever men who came to the house. My thoughts were always with the poor sick prisoners, my mind was ever full of plans for their comfort and relief. I think I was happier when talking to them, and hearing them talk to me, than at any other time. Life was something of a dream to me just then. Rupert and the prison were the two ideas that haunted me unceasingly.

It was at this time I began to attend the prison chapel on Sundays. The chapel was a large hall on the topmost floor, and it looked to the south-east. It was partitioned on the north side into large apartments, called pens, for the felons and common debtors, and in the pens were gratings through which the prisoners could see and be seen. The pulpit stood in the north-west angle; and adjoining it was a large pew allotted to condemned criminals, who, on the Sunday previous to their execution, had a sermon preached to them, and received the sacrament if so disposed. There were handsome pews for master debtors, and also for any persons from without the prison who cared to make use of them. For the most part these pews were little used, but on any Sunday when the sermon to the condemned was to be preached, they were always full to overflowing. I wonder why it is that there is always a species of fascination in

looking upon the faces of those who we know are shortly to die. I was conscious of this myself sometimes as I looked from one to the other of the doomed men ; but then I had a feeling that possibly Rupert might be amongst them, and that gave a strange sense of personal interest to any scrutiny I might make.

My aunt was very good to me at this time. She let me come and go unquestioned, and never wearied of hearing me tell her of all that I did and thought. She gave me money, too, as much as I needed, and I had never had as yet to open my ebony box. I believe she thought it good for me to have this interest to take my thoughts from off my own trouble, and she was one who loved charitable works for their own sake, and would have accompanied me herself, but that she knew her husband would prefer that she did not do so.

To my uncle I spoke little of my visits. He was not fond of talking of the prison, and I had an instinct that he would prefer not to be too conversant with the details I was learning ; but I found in Mary Mackenzie a friend after my own heart, and to her I talked with the greatest unreserve, not only of the prison and its inhabitants, but of the trouble of my own life, and the wild hopes I entertained, which I did not like to breathe to any one else, not even to my aunt.

But Mary, though so quiet and staid in manner,

was by no means lacking in imagination or romance. She sympathized deeply with me ; encouraged me to hope, and above all to pray, and told me that she had never yet prayed as earnestly as I was doing without obtaining an answer. She was greatly pleased too with my visits to the prisoners, and whenever she had time she would be my companion. The sick soon learned to love the sight of her face and the sound of her voice ; for whilst Gowrie ministered to the comfort of their bodies, by her skilful arrangement of beds, and her cleverness at possets and plasters and such like things, and I talked to them of their homes, their friends, and such themes as were pleasant to their ears, Mary could bring healing to their souls, and talk to them so sweetly and appealingly, that tears would stand in the eyes of even hardened, callous men, and they would bless her ere she left for an angel of light.

Poor Eustace was the only patient in the room to whom I was able to talk after such a fashion. The other men changed from week to week, some dying, and others getting better ; but Eustace still lingered on, and he used to look for my visits as the bright spot in his day. He was failing fast at this time, and was growing almost too weak to speak. But his face would light up at my approach, and he would like me to read to him out of my Bible, and explain to him afterwards anything he might not have under-

stood at first. He was very gentle, teachable, and patient, and was so glad to think that death was every day approaching nearer. It was hard for me to enter into his feelings, yet I knew them to be natural enough. What indeed would life be worth without freedom? And then I would think of Rupert, and wonder what he would tell me, were he lying in some dark prison-house, condemned to spend there the rest of his natural life.

Christmas passed strangely to me in my London home. It was not at all like the Christmas season at the Priory—much more quiet, and like any other time. But I do not think I was sorry for it to be so. I was in no mood for merry-making myself, and should have felt out of place in a merry party.

I began now to feel somewhat dissatisfied with the narrowness of the sphere I was allowed to fill in my prison ministrations. I felt that amid all the misery of the great building, what I did to relieve a few sick debtors was but a drop in the ocean. For a time it had contented me, but only for a time. A strange restlessness had seized upon me of late; I was haunted more persistently than ever by thoughts of Rupert. I could not get out of my mind the visions I dreamed at night of his lying alone and unattended, sick and in misery, in some foul place, calling on his wife to come and save him. And with such visions

would mingle memories of Arthur's words about the dismal underground cells in Newgate, which were not fit for me to enter ; and I would wake up at night, crying and shuddering, and calling out aloud that Rupert was there, and that I *would* go to him and either save him or die for him.

In the light of what afterwards happened, some people have said that there was something mysterious in these feelings on my part ; but I have never thought so myself. I believe that, wherever Rupert had been, I should have felt just the same, and that I should have made the same strenuous efforts to obtain admission to the miserable prisoners condemned to a sort of lingering death in those underground places. I could not bear the feeling of being so near to them, and yet unable to lift a finger to help or succour them.

And yet how was I to achieve my object—the object upon which both my own heart and Gowrie's were equally set ? Dear Gowrie ! she was my great comfort in those days, for she shared all my feelings about Rupert, whom she had known and loved well as a boy ; and she spoke more cheerfully and hopefully of his restoration than anybody else dared to do—possibly because she was more ignorant of the real dangers that menaced him. She paid visits to parts of the prison that I hardly ever entered ; for we had sick folks for whom we cared in one or two

of the common wards, and of these Gowrie took almost sole charge. I was afraid of entering these crowded, ill-smelling, noisy rooms, full of brawling men, often more than half drunk. I knew my relatives would hardly wish me to go there, and I had a repugnance against doing so; but Gowrie did not mind half as much, and her visits to the poor wives and little children were an inestimable boon, so that she continued them unremittingly, whilst I had to content myself with the pleasanter tasks in the one sick-room upstairs.

But I was not satisfied with the narrowness of my sphere, and when Eustace died, about the middle of January, I was still less content. I had almost determined that I *would* gain admission to the vaults of the prison, but how was this to be done?

Gowrie was the first to make a definite suggestion on the subject. She had not been in and out of Newgate so constantly for nothing.

“Money will do it, my dearie, if naught else will. There’s not a door in Newgate but will be opened by a golden key. I don’t say but what Dobbs is an honest man, and wouldn’t willingly go against the master; but luckily for us, he’s not in charge of them underground places. Fox has care of them. Do you know Fox—an ill-looking man, with red hair and a blear eye? He will do anything for a few gold

guineas—I'll warrant he will; and as for Dobbs, all he has to do is not to see or notice what we do, or heed our comings and goings. A little yellow ointment will soon blind his eyes: you may leave me to settle all that."

Gowrie's words filled me with new hopes and purposes; yet I did shrink a little at first from the idea of corrupting my uncle's servants, to make them do what he would have forbidden them had he been applied to. And yet—and yet—it seemed the only way, and I was so bent on doing it; and in one sense I felt that I was right to go. It is often very hard to dissever totally good from evil; and if the plan I proposed taking had some elements of wrong in it, yet my conscience would not have let me rest had I abandoned it, and allowed the wish within me to slumber—the wish that urged me to do something for the comfort of those poor prisoners in their cruel captivity. It seemed as if it were a work that I had been called on specially to undertake, and which I could not give up without a struggle. Then, too, I had an instinct that my uncle was too kind and humane a man to object very seriously to what I proposed doing, if only it were done without his knowledge. I knew that he would be obliged to say me nay if I applied to him. His official position forced him to be stern and strict. But if, without

any knowledge and consent of his, I forced my way whither I would, I did not believe that he would be seriously angry, even if the matter did come to his ears. He must have known what Gowrie told to me, that if these poor creatures had had money to bribe the jailers, they would be far less straitly lodged. It was in reality poverty, not crime, that made their case so hard ; and the cruel injustice of such a state of things made my blood boil.

I hesitated, but not for long. I settled at length in my own mind that, right or wrong, I must get my wish. I was resolved, however, that these visits should be a close secret between Gowrie and myself. Not a member of my uncle's house should have the least suspicion of what was going on ; nor would I use any of his money or that of my aunt for purposes for which I could not demand his approbation and sympathy. My own ebony box was unlocked at last, and a row of golden guineas extracted. I left Gowrie to make the bargains with the men, but we went well provided. I did not hesitate, in such a cause, to use the money that was in some measure Rupert's. Was it not partly for his sake that it was expended ? If I could do nothing for him personally, was it not something to feel that I was helping those who were in like case with him ?

How well I remember my first descent of those

damp slippery stairs that led downwards, as it seemed, to the heart of the earth! There had been less difficulty with the jailers than I had anticipated. Dobbs, a really good-hearted and humane man, had been quite ready to see nothing and leave us to our own devices, and Fox was the kind of creature who would sell his soul for a bribe. He went heavily down the stairs, with a small lantern in his hand and his keys jingling at his belt. I followed with bated breath and a beating heart, for now that my dream was realized I felt half afraid of my own success.

"It is the sick we wish specially to see," explained Gowrie, as we stood in the vault-like passage which struck upon us damp and chill as the grave.

"Such as is fool enough to stay down here mostly be sick," answered the man with a gruff laugh. "Most of them have sense to get into better quarters after a bit. I've not above half-a-dozen down here now; and one won't be here much longer, and two new-comers have sent to their friends to get them into the Castle. Here's one of your men," and he opened a door and let us pass in. "I can't give you more than ten minutes each, if you want to go to all." He spoke in brutal fashion, with many oaths, but I cannot attempt to give more than the sense of his words.

We entered, to find ourselves in a damp, chill cell

with an elderly man of rather fine appearance, who wore heavy fetters, and was lying on a sort of rude stone bed. He was evidently very weak, and our presence bewildered him not a little; but we had not come empty-handed, and after Gowrie had made him eat and drink a little, he was able to tell us something of his history, which was common enough in those days, yet very pitiful.

He was expecting daily to take his trial, and was in some hopes of acquittal, as the charges against him were altogether unfounded. Meantime he was suffering much from ague in that dismal place, and was fearful of losing such strength as should enable him to make a good defence when called upon to do so. Gowrie, at a sign from me, despatched Fox for one of the blankets, of which we kept a supply in the prison under the care of Dobbs; and a bottle of good wine from her ample pocket was secreted in a dark place where it was likely to escape the jailer's eye. We promised that he should not be left in utter destitution for the future, and left him, I verily believe, under the belief that it was all a wonderful dream.

In the next cell we visited, the occupant was shouting aloud in wild delirium. He had a raging fever on him, Fox explained; and Gowrie begged me not to come in, for she had a fear of my catching fever by too close contact with the patients. There

was another door close to this one, which Fox unlocked with a short laugh, saying,—

“The young lady can go in here. ‘Twill save time so, and she won’t catch anything there. He’s quiet enough, and will be quieter still before many days have passed !”

I shivered a little as I heard these ill-omened words; but Gowrie made no objection, and I stepped alone into the cell. The door closed behind me, though it was not locked. I was alone in the grave-like place with a stiff rigid figure that looked as if it might well have been a corpse.

This was the worst cell I had yet seen. It was more dark, more damp, more noisome than any we had entered before. I could not imagine how any one could live in such a place. I felt half afraid to approach the still figure lying so rigidly upon the bed of stone.

Yet as my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness I made my way with timid steps towards the prisoner, and looked at him with attention. His face was turned away, and all that I could see was that it was deadly pale, and that the eyes were fast closed, as if in sleep—or death. The figure seemed that of a young man between twenty and thirty, tall and well-proportioned, though wasted almost to a skeleton. One nerveless hand lay exposed to view; and as I gazed with a sense of inexplicable fascination at the motion-

less figure, a ring upon one finger instantly attracted my attention. It was not that this ring was of any value ; it was but a little silver toy, very plain, and now very thin, as if by constant wear. But it was just such a ring as this that I had put upon the finger of my boy-husband when he had come to say his last adieu before quitting the country with his father. My heart beat almost to suffocation as I bent over the white hand and gazed at the ring as if it could tell me its history. Then with a mist rising before my eyes that almost blinded their vision, I approached one pace nearer the head of that rude couch and bent down over the man, who had remained all this while unconscious of my presence.

He had no wig, and his own hair, which was a bright brown, so far as I could see in the gloom, curled about his neck and shoulders in a fashion that was surely familiar. His face was still turned away towards the wall, but I could see the outline of features that, even wasted as they now were by sickness and suffering, seemed, unless my sight deceived me, likewise familiar. My uncontrollable agitation of a few moments back changed suddenly into an almost unnatural calm. My instinct told me that I was on the verge of some discovery, but I was as composed as if I were an indifferent person, or as if I were moving in a dream.

I laid my hand upon the prisoner's head and turned it a little towards me. I could see the features now—those finely-cut, high-bred features that I had admired so much in my young cavalier lover, and in those ancestors whose pictures, ranged along the walls of his home, had given us so many hours of discussion and story-weaving.

Whether I was waking or sleeping I could not at that moment have told, but what I did know was that, after eight long years of separation, Rupert and I were together again. I bent over him and pressed my lips to his.

“Rupert!” I said softly.

Very slowly his eyes unclosed—those dark-blue shadowy eyes that had so persistently haunted my dreams of late. If I had not known him before, I should have known him when he looked at me. Yet, even though our eyes met, there was no surprise in his glance, only a sort of restful satisfaction.

“Maud!” he whispered very softly—“Maud!”

“Dear love,” I answered, with a trembling voice, “do you know me again?”

“Know you?” He looked half surprised, then his eyes closed wearily again. “Of course I know you; you are always there. Maud, my own sweet wife!”

And then I knew that he had mistaken me for a phantom of his own brain, and that he knew not, in

his sickness and weakness, how to dissever the real from the unreal. Yet, even so, my heart bounded with joy and triumph ; for did it not prove that he had ever been faithful to me, as I to him, if in the hour of mortal sickness mine was the face haunting his dreams, mine the name upon his lips ?

“ Dear husband, I have come to you,” I answered, kissing him again ; and he smiled, though his eyes remained fast shut.

A few minutes of silence passed, and then Gowrie came bustling in to see if she could do anything for this patient, who was said to be *in extremis*. I signed to her to close the door fast behind her, and then springing forward I seized both her hands in mine.

“ Gowrie, Gowrie ! who do you think it is ?” I cried, a sudden wild excitement replacing the unnatural calm of a few minutes back. “ We have found him ! I have found him at last—at last ! It is Rupert Melville, my husband, who is lying there ! ”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRISONER.

Autobiographical fragment continued.

OF my own feelings and those of my faithful nurse, when once we were assured that it was Rupert and none other who lay before us, I need not, cannot write. But the tumult of joy that possessed us was sadly damped by the very critical state in which the prisoner lay, reduced by fever and ague and unhealed wounds to so low an ebb that he appeared to be even now in an almost dying state.

That he would die, and that very quickly, if left in his present quarters, required no skill to see ; and we knew that money would procure him a better lodging. Yet it would not do to evince too great a tenderness towards this one prisoner, lest suspicion should be attracted towards him and towards ourselves ; for even from the first the idea of effecting his escape flashed through my brain as a wild and distant possibility, and if that was ever to be accomplished, it would never

do to betray his identity or to call attention to him by any special mark of interest.

Again, it was most important that he should remain in isolation, both on account of his extreme bodily illness, and because I wished no witness to the meetings that I must contrive to arrange between us. If we had him conveyed to the Castle, he would be lodged with others, and it might be that all my vague hopes would be frustrated; yet it was death for him to remain where he was.

Fox was opening the door by this time and bidding us come out.

“He is past serving, that one, you’ll find. Have you had enough for one day?”

“As for that, I think we have,” answered Gowrie, for I dared not trust my voice; “but we like not to leave yonder poor lad to die in such a hole. Have you no better place you could put him in for the few days that are left to him?”

“He won’t pay for a better lodging,” was the sullen answer, “or he might have it.”

“But if the lady would pay a trifle, where could you put him?—not in the Castle, you know, but in some place a little better than that damp hole.”

“He might have the boarded room at the end of the passage for a guinea a week if he’d pay it. It has a fireplace and a bed, for it was meant for the

warder of these cells ; but I care not to live underground. And he should have it if he would pay me ; but that he can't or won't do, so he must lie on his bed as he chooses to make it."

"Show us the room," I said.

Fox went to the end of the passage, mounted a few steps, and opened the door of a room that, compared with the damp stone cells we had left behind, was a veritable paradise. It had a boarded floor and a fireplace, as the man had said, and also a window that let in a very fair amount of light, though it was barred and only half rose above the level of the ground. There was a bedstead in it, and a table and two rickety chairs. It was very dirty, but that fault could soon be mended.

"A guinea a week seems a good deal for such a place," I said, pretending to hesitate. "But then it is hardly likely to be for long."

"He will not live the month out, I'll warrant you, and I ought to know," said Fox, who was evidently anxious to strike the bargain ; and Gowrie bid me think of the poor young man's pitiful condition, assuring me I should not repent having purchased him a few comforts at the end of his life.

My kindness of heart towards the sick was by this time pretty well known to all the men about the jail, so I did not feel it necessary to be very long in com-

ing to a decision. I told Gowrie that she had better give her instructions as to what would be necessary, and that I would pay anything in reason for the comfort of the dying man ; and then she conducted me to the prison gate and left me to go home quietly, whilst she went back to superintend the cleaning of the room and the removal of the patient. I knew that Gowrie's zeal and discretion were alike to be trusted, and much as I longed to remain myself, I knew it would be wise not to do so. I was in a state of such excitement that I was afraid to trust myself, and my limbs trembled so much as I mounted the stairs that I was half afraid I should fall. When once I had reached the safe shelter of my room, I sank on my knees beside the bed and burst into a passion of weeping. I knew not whether gladness, thankfulness, or sorrow had the larger share in my tears ; for though I had found my husband alive, I dared not think of the future, it was so beset with peril and danger. I could only let myself think of the present moment, and dwell on the relief of taking him out of that noisome hole, little better than a living grave. I must let the good or the evil of the day be sufficient for me for the present.

It was a fortunate thing for me that day that both my uncle and aunt were away from home. Business had summoned Mr. Fells to Edmonstone that morning,

and as his wife had a sister living in that place, whom she had not seen for many a year, she had decided to be his companion, and they expected to be one or even two nights absent from home. It was partly this absence on my uncle's part that had induced me to choose that day for making the attempt at visiting the cells which had led to such strange results. Heretofore I had had some fear lest I might by chance encounter him in a part of the prison where my presence would evoke inquiries on his side. I was doubly glad of this absence now, as I could hardly have concealed from the loving eyes of my aunt traces of the excitement and emotion I had undergone. She would have questioned me, I should have become agitated, and might, without intending it, have betrayed my own secret. And that I knew I must not do; however great might be the temptation. My uncle had his official position to maintain, and my aunt was his wife. It would be doing her and him alike an injury to let them know that my husband was incarcerated in Newgate. Their hearts might bleed for him and for me, but it would probably become my uncle's duty to watch such a prisoner very closely, and also perhaps to put a stop to my free visiting of the prison. If ever I was to obtain his escape (and though I could as yet attempt no plans, the idea was never long out of my head), my uncle must never know what I was

planning—not indeed until all interest or excitement had long subsided. I did not know whether the escape of such a prisoner would raise any particular comment or inquiry,—I led myself to hope he was of too little consequence for it to do so, as he was evidently to be allowed to die without an attempt to save him,—but I could not be certain, and must act in all things with the greatest caution and care. I had plenty of time to think of all this during the long hours that Gowrie was away, and by the time she had returned I was able to listen calmly to what she had to say.

She came back radiant with pleasure at all she had accomplished, though she always looked grave when I pressed for her opinion of Rupert's state, and gave evasive answers; but in her diffuse and roundabout way, she made me understand all that she had done.

She told me that she had made friends with Fox, by the administration of a handsome bribe, and by a cautiously-worded hint that it would be well worth his while, in the long run, to pay proper attention to the sick gentleman now. She had then got the room thoroughly cleaned and well warmed by a fire; had procured good bedding and clean blankets and linen; and had paid ready money for everything, which had made all go very smoothly. Then she and the jailer between them had carried the sick man to his new

quarters ; had dressed his wounds, which were in a terribly neglected state, and must have caused him much suffering ; and had got him to bed, without more exhaustion than was unavoidable. She had been very indignant to find that, ill and weak as he was, he had been heavily fettered, and had worn the fetters so many months that they had actually begun to eat into the flesh. She had, however, succeeded in mastering her anger, and had got them removed by another bribe. Then the man had been dismissed, and she had tended and cared for Rupert like a mother, washing away all the foul traces of neglect, and making him clean and comfortable, as he could not have been since his entrance, six months ago, into that fetid den.

All this while he had appeared to be unconscious of anything that went on. He neither opened his eyes nor spoke, nor evinced anything, beyond a few signs of suffering when his neglected wounds had been dressed. But when he had been in bed some half-hour, and had taken some of the cordial and the nourishment that Gowrie forced upon him every few minutes, he seemed to become aware of a strange sense of ease and comfort, and opened his eyes and looked wonderingly round him. Gowrie had had the good sense to leave him alone, and not to excite him by any kind of questioning. He was too weak him-

self to talk, but lay looking at her, and then round the strange room, closing his eyes from time to time, as if too weary even to wonder longer. Only the look of peace and rest deepened on his face, and he would feebly turn himself upon his soft bed, as if the luxury of lying on something different from the accustomed stones could be intensified by some such movement. Once he spoke and said,—

“I cannot understand.”

To which Gowrie answered,—

“There is no call you should, sir. You have only got to lie quiet, and get back some strength if you can.”

And by degrees she fed him up, and lulled him off into a sound, healthy sleep, such as, I daresay, he had not enjoyed for months.

When Fox returned to conduct her out she held another consultation with him. She was acute enough to know that the more heavily she bribed him, and the more valuable she made his secret to him, the more trustworthy and zealous we should find him. She therefore arranged with him a direct system of payment for each visit she or I should make to these underground cells, and gave him commissions to execute for each of the unfortunates we had that day seen, so that he might not think us too much engrossed in the one prisoner. She made him understand about

this latter, however, that the longer he lived, the more there would be to gain ; and she intimated also that the obvious brutality and neglect with which he had been treated would by no means be pleasing to Mr. Fells, if it should ever chance to reach his ears.

The cupidity and fear of the man being alike excited, she felt little doubt that Rupert would receive proper care from his jailer for the future. She had expressed it as her opinion that the lady would venture the following day to see that her orders had been duly carried out ; and as our visits were to put money each time into his pocket, Fox made no manner of objection, but even hinted that if we would only keep the secret well, we might have admission pretty much as we liked, only on our own terms of payment. This corruptibility, disgusting as it was from a moral aspect, was most welcome to us at such a time. It not only gave us the means of visiting my dear husband almost at will, but it put Fox so completely into our power that it was plain, even from the first, that he would soon be a mere tool in our hands. Of course the game we were about to play was costly as well as hazardous, but Gowrie knew all about the ebony box with its heavy treasure, and was aware that ample funds were at our disposal that would not be grudged in such a cause.

The last piece of intelligence that she imparted was

to me almost the most important of all. She told me that Fox had said to her that, if we proposed visiting this part of the prison often or regularly, we had better do so in a more secret fashion than we had done that day. He went on then to explain to her that there was a private way from the governor's house to the condemned hold, which lay directly beneath it, and from thence access could be obtained by underground passages to the cells we had visited to-day. It was hardly possible that we should encounter any officials in these passages, and if we could only obtain a key to the door from the governor's house, we could come and go unobserved without getting him or ourselves into any trouble. Fox could always meet us by appointment, and let us in to see such prisoners as we desired to visit.

He had gone on to explain to Gowrie the position of the door under discussion, and she knew it quite well, and had speculated about it at various times. It was in an out-of-the-way corner of the house, in a dark passage not far from the foot of the back staircase. Gowrie promised me that she would have a key to it before she was many days older; and though my heart and my conscience gave me a prick, as I thought of my uncle and aunt, and wondered what they would say to it all, yet the thought of Rupert lying sick unto death, almost within reach of the

sound of my voice, conquered all other feelings ; and I verily believed that if my relatives knew all, they would bid me persevere as I meant to do, but would wish that I should hold my peace to them. This at least I resolved to do, and Gowrie approved my reticence, and promised as close a secrecy herself.

How that day passed I cannot tell. Arthur came home for a brief while, but went off again, at my suggestion, to pay a visit to Mrs. Mackenzie, who had been shut up many weeks in the house, with a stiffening of the joints to which she was subject in the winter months. Arthur's attachment to Mistress Mary was beginning to attract notice just now, and his father was not well pleased that he should look no higher for a wife. There had been words on the matter more than once ; but the mother had taken my cousin's part, and we all thought that the father would not oppose the match for long. I was sometimes asked to praise Mary in his hearing, and put in a plea for Arthur, because I was a favourite with my uncle ; and this I gladly did, so that an excellent understanding existed between my cousin and me, which was of great assistance to me further on.

That night I was glad to be rid of him ; and I went early to bed, that it might sooner be day—the day that was to see my reunion with Rupert. But there was little real sleep for me that night, and glad indeed

was I when I began to hear sounds of life about the house, and knew that another day had dawned.

I descended at the usual hour, and chatted with my cousin at breakfast-time as usual. He much regretted he had not leisure to remain at home, or take me to see some sights; but business required his presence in Fleet Street, and I said I thought it too cold to go about seeing places.

He went away in due course, and I paid one of my customary visits to the prison, and after having done my utmost to exchange a word with the poor prisoners who looked upon my coming as one of the few pleasures of their lives, I went down the stairs again, dismissed Dobbs by a gesture, and joined Gowrie and Fox, who were waiting my approach below.

“He is better to-day—much better,” whispered Gowrie, as we followed the jailer down the dark stairs. “Be cautious, dear heart; he may know you by this time.”

I drew my hood more closely over my face, and my heart beat almost to suffocation, as we followed the jailer down the dark, damp passage; and when he opened for us the door of the room at the end, my eyes swam in such a mist of tears that I could see nothing save the outline of the room and the figure upon the bed.

Gowrie was very prudent, and her presence of mind and kindly tact stood us in good stead.

"See here, my lady," she began confidentially, bustling about and producing from her basket and ample pockets one or two of the things we had brought with us; "we must not take up too much of this good man's time." By the good man she meant Fox. "You can sit a bit with the poor sick gentleman and see how he does, and I'll go and see the other poor creatures down here, and come to you later on."

Fox made no objection to this arrangement, and in another moment, before the mist had cleared from my eyes, I heard the door locked behind the retreating figures, and knew that I was alone with my husband.

Making one effort at self-control, that was successful outwardly at least, I put back my hood and made a step forward.

"Rupert!" I said softly.

My husband was lying in a comfortable bed near to a bright fire. His face was perfectly colourless and fearfully sunken and haggard, and his posture alone plainly betokened extreme prostration and exhaustion; but his eyes were fixed upon me with strange luminous intensity, and though he was still afraid to trust the evidence of his senses, it was plainly the light of reason that was shining in their depths.

"My own dear husband," I said, bending over him and kissing him again and again. "Rupert, dear love,

do you know me again? I am your wife, and I have come to you at last."

He caught my hands in his own and pressed them feebly. A great light of bewildered joy was shining in his eyes. His face had lit up with the old eager smile I knew so well, albeit only the shadow of its former self.

"Maud!" he whispered faintly. "It is Maud—my Maud—my wife! Or is it a dream?"

"No dream, my dearest. I am your own wife. O Rupert, husband, if you only knew how I have longed and hungered for you!"

He put his hand up to his brow.

"I cannot understand it," he said. "Where am I? And how came you here—thus?"

Then I took a chair and sat down close beside him, and holding his hands in mine I told him all my story, beginning from the day he left us up till yesterday, when we found him in that terrible cell. I think it was well for both of us just then that he was too ill and weak to be even much excited about anything. He lay very still and quiet, with his eyes fixed upon my face, and though his mind was clear enough now to follow and understand all I said, his extreme prostration prevented him from growing agitated, or distressed, or angry.

When I had told him all, he lay very still and quiet,

and presently I saw that tears were standing in his eyes. That made me bend over him and kiss him once again.

“And you were faithful to me through all, little sweetheart,” he said, “and have come to me even here! Ought I to accept so great a sacrifice? Ought I even to let your lot be linked with mine—”

I laid my hand upon his lips.

“Hush!” I said; “you cannot help it. We are joined together, we are one. Nothing—nobody can change that now.”

“Except death,” he answered, very steadfastly and quietly. “My dear, dear wife, have you realized that you have found your husband only to lose him? If this sickness spares me (thanks to your tender care), the law will be less merciful. Alas! that I should only live to destroy your peace and happiness.”

“Hush!” I said again. “Rupert, you are not to talk or even to think thus. Strive to get well for my sake, and all may yet be well. In one sense it shall be well, for if I cannot save you, I will die with you. I am resolved.”

He would have answered me, but I would not let him. He was far too weak and ill to be able to carry on an argument. Even listening to me had exhausted him greatly, and I was relieved when Gowrie entered with the news that Fox had promised to leave us locked up in that room for half-an-hour.

Together we dressed Rupert's wounds, which were in his sword-arm and shoulder, and showed a tendency towards gangrene, owing to the cruel neglect he had suffered. Gowrie, however, was very hopeful that the care and skill she purposed lavishing upon them and him would avert any threatened danger; but had he been left as he was many weeks longer, nothing could have saved him.

A slight smile passed over Rupert's face as he heard those words, and I knew what the smile meant, and felt a sort of shiver run through me. But if my husband thought little of his chances of life, I at least was hopeful. What girl of my age and temperament ever despaired, when all the happiness of life, nay, even life itself, was at stake?

As we dressed his wounds, I asked him once if we hurt him, for I felt that there was a little involuntary shrinking even from the gentlest of touches. He looked at me with his own old smile.

"Hurt!" he repeated. "I do not think anything could hurt me in a place like this."

I looked round the bare little room doubtfully. It seemed to me a sordid kind of place enough. I said so to him, whereat he smiled again.

"You have not tried six months of a prison cell, sweetheart," he said, "with a bed of stone, and no light or warmth even in the bitterest weather. To

lie once again in a clean bed, to feel the glow of a fire, to be free from fetters, and rest at ease and move without pain—ah, you will never, I trust, know what such luxury can be. And with all this, to be tended by gentle, loving hands, to see the face of one who is dearest in all the world—Maud, Maud, my own sweet wife, it is hard sometimes to believe that I am yet on earth. It is almost as if I had passed the gates of death, and had awokened to find myself in Paradise!"

And then Gowrie discreetly withdrew to superintend some culinary process at the fire, and I wound my arms about my husband and held him close, whilst an inarticulate cry of thanksgiving went up from my heart to the good God of heaven and earth, who had been pleased, after all these years of weary waiting, to restore us one to the other.*

* Lady Maud's narrative fails to make quite clear that the cause of Rupert Melville's long silence was due to the loss of letters. He had written so many (none of which reached their destination) that at length he concluded that his wife's family were antagonistic to him, probably on account of some false report brought against him. And in the end he resolved to write no more, but to appear in person to clear his character and claim his bride.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BROTHER.

THE discovery by Maud Melville of her husband in Newgate was a matter to cause much anxiety as well as much rejoicing. For a few weeks his life seemed to hang upon a thread. The effects of six months' cruel imprisonment were not easily dissipated. Had he not possessed a constitution of exceptional soundness, he must have sunk before; and even as it was, it appeared as if his young wife had but secured for him a more easy and peaceful death-bed. The fever that had fastened upon him, though intermittent in its character, was so persistent in its recurrence and so severe when it came, that it was very doubtful if the patient would have strength to shake it off. He had now everything in his favour, so far as nursing and proper food and kindly care for his comfort went; but medical attention was out of the question, as was also removal out of the prison precincts, or even into better quarters. And although

the room he now occupied seemed to Rupert a palace of luxury, yet there was much to be desired still in the matter of pure air and dryness, for a patient in so critical a state, and especially for one habituated to a life of open-air freedom and liberty.

Therefore it was long before the life-and-death struggle was really fought out and the battle fairly won by the powers of life. And all that time the wife had watched with ceaseless devotion by her husband's sick-bed, and it was, without doubt, to her tenderness and the skill of the good nurse that Rupert owed his recovery.

One good object had, however, been attained by his tedious and serious illness. His trial (the trial, that is, of Robert Moore) had been once again postponed by the inability of the prisoner to appear. In the first instance, he was to have been tried in November, but was far too ill. Then February had been appointed as the time, but when the day came he was utterly unable to rise from his bed. As he was but an insignificant prisoner, one of a crowd of persons similarly implicated, no special notice was attracted by his non-appearance. It was no such very unusual matter for prisoners to die before their trial, or to be unable to appear before the judge; and now it was not likely that Robert Moore would be summoned again before May or June—not in any case

before the Easter recess. Maud breathed more freely when she heard this piece of news, for it gave her a sense of security as to time that was most welcome. If only she could restore her husband to health, what might she not accomplish before May?

And all this while no one in her uncle's house suspected aught of the secret that was as life itself to her all those weeks.

The private door from Mr. Fells's house to the prison was of inestimable service both in the preservation of their secret and in the ease of communication with her husband. It enabled her to spend whole nights in the sick-room when the danger was at its height, and only constant care and watching could save the patient's life; and it enabled her, too, to visit him almost at will, by the exercise of a little caution on her own part and that of Gowrie, for as long as she could slip through the door unseen by any of her uncle's household she had nothing more to fear.

Fox was entirely won over. He was reaping such a bountiful harvest of golden guineas from the friends of this once insignificant prisoner, that it was his best interest to see and hear nothing he was not meant to, and to obey orders implicitly. He naturally desired above all things to keep alive a prisoner who lined his pockets so well, and to encourage the visits of those who feed him every time they came. As these visits

could now be paid without the knowledge of a soul in the prison except himself, he cared not how frequent they were. There was no danger of suspicion attaching to himself as long as they were paid thus secretly ; and the maintenance of the secret was now of as much consequence to himself as to any one. He was too deeply implicated to betray it from any motive whatever.

Maud's frequent absences from the house excited no comment. She was supposed to be in the prison, as indeed she generally was, and her pleasure in her work there and the good it was doing her were matters of open comment amongst her relatives. The work and the charitable offices she performed plainly distracted her mind from her own trying position. The colour had come back to her face, the light to her eyes. Oliver saw a change each time he came, wondered at it, and questioned if it could be that she was learning to forget Rupert.

Mr. Chalcote came from time to time to see her ; but though she liked him as a friend, as a suitor he was intolerable, and she generally contrived to keep him at a distance. He saw this and held aloof, striving after patience ; but he did not despair of winning her yet.

Of Rupert she never spoke now. The name never crossed her lips. Her relatives were glad, for nothing had so far been heard of that "unfortunate young

man," and every month that passed increased their belief that he was dead.

Maud was more disposed to go into society at this juncture than she had ever appeared to be before. She seemed to be maturing rapidly just now. Thought, purpose, and a kind of subtle power had taken the place of the former girlish dependence; and the varying moods of childlike gaiety and youthful depression of spirit that had alternated in her mind during many past months were now replaced by a steady serenity of spirit, not gay or buoyant, but fraught with a certain indescribable force and character that roused a good deal of speculation in the minds of those who knew her best.

Oliver was the nearest to arriving at the truth. He knew more of his sister's true mind than any one else. He had a gift of penetration not common at his years, and his powers of observation had been quickened by the career he had chosen for himself. He often visited his uncle's house, and the more he saw of his sister the more convinced did he become that it was no mere passing change of feeling that had come over her. He saw deeper than that. He saw that some steady purpose was burning within her, and that the light of a new hope and a new resolve was shining in her eyes. Her very silence about Rupert increased his suspicions as to the cause

of the change in her. For many weeks she had met him with an eager, anxious appeal in her eyes. She had never seen him without forcing him to remember her difficult and pathetic position by the sad wistfulness of her glances and the quick, eager way in which she would listen to any conversation that could bear in any way upon her husband's possible fate. But of late all this had changed. The sadness, if not gone, had quite changed its character, and the anxious wistfulness was merged in something altogether different. The bloom had come back to her cheek, the light to her eye, and a few weeks seemed to have transformed her from the girl to the woman. Oliver, watching her closely, drew his own deductions, which took at length the form of a definite question.

"Maud," he said to her one day early in March, as he sat beside her one evening apart,—there was too much conversation and laughter in the room for any private words to be overheard,—"you have had news of Rupert?"

It was more a statement than a question, and the girl slowly turned her head and looked at her brother. There was something almost like fear in her eyes.

"Do not be afraid, sister mine," he said, with unwonted gentleness; "no one has said a word of it. It is your eyes alone that have of late betrayed your secret to me."

Maud had turned away her head, and was now looking straight out before her. Her lips were closely shut, as if she would never again permit a sound to pass them. Oliver discovered the thought in her mind, and answered it ere it was spoken. He laid his hand upon hers, and said in a very low tone,—

“ You have nothing to fear from me, Maud. I, too, am Rupert’s friend.”

She turned her head and looked steadfastly at him.

“ Our mother on her death-bed begged of me to be a true friend to you and to my brother-in-law, in whatever circumstances you might be placed. I told her I would endeavour in all things to do my duty, and I believe she was satisfied, though, perhaps, it would have been better to speak more openly. It has not, at any time, been easy for us to speak without reserve, but I can do so now better than I could do then. My sympathies have always been with you and Rupert. I was fond of him when we were boys together, and my feelings have never changed. Had matters come to a crisis between you and Cotttingham, I would boldly have taken your part. As it was, I felt I could serve you best by holding my peace; and it is in part my doing that you came here and have remained here all these months. Do you believe in my good faith, Maud ? ”

She laid her hand in his, and answered that she

did. Yet she did not offer any further information then, nor did he press it; on the contrary, his words expressed a wish not to be admitted to her confidence without due warrant.

"If I have divined your secret, Maud, it is not that I desire any confidence from you. You are perfectly right and wise to use the extremest caution, and the fewer you intrust with your secret the safer it will remain. All I wish to say is this: that if ever you want the help and counsel of a brother—a brother who is also a man of the law, and has some little knowledge of the world to boot—come to me without hesitancy or fear. Whether I can help you materially or not, I cannot, of course, say; what I can promise, however, is—that the will shall not be lacking, and that the secret shall be as faithfully kept as if buried in the sea. You may trust me to be as true to Rupert as you are yourself: I cannot say more."

Maud pressed her brother's hand in grateful acknowledgment, but said nothing then. It was neither the time nor the place, as he well knew; but from the look upon her face, he felt sure that before very many days or weeks had passed she would avail herself of his offer.

Nor was he mistaken.

By this time the severe stress of illness was past,

and Rupert was slowly, very slowly amending. It now became needful to face bravely and calmly the perils of the future, and consider what could be done to avert or mitigate them. In truth, the outlook was gloomy enough. There was not the least room to hope that, if Robert Moore were brought up for trial, he would escape with his life. He had been caught in the act of effecting a secret landing, with treasonable papers upon him, and his offence had been aggravated by his resolute resistance to the officers of the law, which had resulted in the death of one of them. To announce his real name and rank would be worse than useless. True, he might possibly be transferred from Newgate to the Tower, and more excitement would undoubtedly be caused by the trial ; but it was hardly possible that any benefit could come to him from these courses. Rather, the fact of his having left Saint Germain with such papers in his charge, and endeavoured to enter the country under a feigned name, would tell the more heavily against him. His assurance of ignorance as to the character of the papers would carry no weight at all ; and the alarm and indignation at the Preston Plot had by no means died out in men's minds, and scant mercy were Jacobites likely to receive at the hands of their judges. The King himself was soon to leave the country for the Continent, and there was a feeling in many minds

that justice would be even more rigorously administered in his absence than when he was at home. The young man himself faced the truth from the first, and whilst clinging to life and hope with the natural tenacity of human nature, never blinded his eyes to the peril in which he stood, and sometimes told his girl-wife, with a sad smile, that she was only saving his life for a harder fate than death in prison would now be.

A look of purpose and resolve would come into Maud's eyes when he spoke thus; but she waited until she had seen him fairly on the way to recovery before she breathed to him a word of the plan that had long been seething in her mind.

"Rupert," she said one day to him, when he had spoken of the hopelessness of his condition, "there is yet one thing we have never spoken of, and that is escape."

He smiled a little sadly.

"I have thought of it many times, sweetheart, but each time with less of hope. I cannot feel that I shall ever get back that amount of strength and activity necessary for such an attempt—not at least so long as I remain here. Happy as I am in your dear company, I pine for a breath of the pure outside air and the sunshine that never comes here. You cannot understand how this long captivity has sapped

away the old vitality I used to know, and robbed me of all that strength and power that once was mine. I have got the better of the mortal illness that threatened me, but shall I ever grow much stronger than I am now? Methinks, sometimes, that I shall not. I would not be faint-hearted if I saw a reasonable hope of success; but when I think of what is needed ere a prisoner can hope to escape, my spirit almost fails me. I cannot hope to succeed; and the terrible fear of failure—that goes far to paralyze my hopes. The very longing for liberty seems but to increase my present weakness. You cannot guess what those six months were like in that cell from which you rescued me. It takes more than the same time for a man to recover from effects like those, and I have but till May to call my own—if, indeed, I be not summoned before my judges even earlier than that."

Maud made no reply, and presently the young man continued,—

"And if I do escape, what good will my life be to me? I shall ever live as with a sword suspended over my head should I remain here. And if I go away to exile, how can I ask you, sweet wife, to share so hard a fate? You who were born to be a star, and grace a noble sphere, to what a fate have you linked yourself! I cannot bear to think of the trouble I have brought upon your innocent head."

And then Maud, stopping his lips by a kiss, told him of her brother's words, spoken but a day or two since, asked him if the counsel of a man like Oliver might not perchance be of some service to them, and if he could trust her brother with his secret.

The result of this interview was that late one evening Oliver was brought by Maud into the room where Rupert lay, disguised in the ample cloak and hood worn generally by Nurse Gowrie.

It was nine years since these two had met, and Rupert's pale, thin face quivered as Oliver threw off his trappings and approached the bed where the sick man lay. But the greeting between them was very quiet, and Oliver proceeded at once to the object in hand, which was to ascertain from his brother-in-law exactly what amount of evidence could be adduced against him. He looked grave as Rupert told him in what light his conduct must appear to others, and proceeded next to cross-question the prisoner very closely as to his real object in visiting Saint Germain, and the exact amount of intercourse he had held with the disaffected noblemen and gentlemen who were assembled there. As Rupert recounted his history, the young lawyer's brow cleared somewhat, and he looked less sombre than he had done at first.

Rupert was still too weak to tell a long tale, or to be diffuse in any part of his narrative. He had been

travelling in distant lands during the memorable years between 1687 and 1690, had not received any very definite accounts of the occurrences that had led to the change of dynasty in this country, yet had heard enough to prepossess him, despite his loyalist training, in favour of the Dutch Stadholder. He had learned enough in his travels to give him a wholesome hatred of tyranny, and also to increase greatly his love for the pure Protestant faith in which he had been brought up. He was greatly afraid that King James would subvert the latter by the undue exercise of his power; and despite his hereditary love for the name of Stuart, he felt little love for the present head of that house, as represented in accounts he had heard. Yet it had seemed to the young man, when he actually was on French soil, as if his father would hardly have wished him to return to his native land without having paid his respects in person to the fallen monarch, whose father and brother had been dear to him and his. As to joining in any plots for his restoration, nothing could have been further from Rupert's thoughts; and he was as yet too little conversant with the way in which matters were tending to have any idea that he could imperil his good name, still less his personal safety, by a simple visit to Saint Germains. This visit had accordingly been paid, had lasted but a few days, and had entirely disillusioned

the mind of the young man, if indeed any such disillusionment was necessary. The pusillanimous and contemptible character of the fallen prince had never been so clearly demonstrated as in the hour of his humiliation. Not all the generous and chivalrous courtesy paid him by the haughty French monarch, and insisted upon by him with a rigour that brooked no breach of etiquette, could altogether impress upon even the servile French courtiers that respect of manner that royalty can usually insure for itself. The contempt that the character of the man excited was not to be concealed beneath any mask ; and yet, so low had his moral nature fallen, that he went on his way in utter ignorance of the feelings his cowardice and treachery everywhere awakened, and was as self-satisfied and complaisant as if he were playing the part of a hero and patriot.

A very few days had sufficed to convince Rupert that if he wished to retain any remnant of loyal feeling towards the unfortunate house of Stuart, he had better tarry no longer at Saint Germain. Moreover, he was beginning to feel a great longing to see once again the face of his sweet girl-wife, and to begin with her the new life of domestic peace and happiness to which he had looked forward with greater or less eagerness through all the years of his exile. During the years he had travelled in more distant lands,

correspondence had ceased between him and his relatives ; but he had no difficulty in raising money for his passing needs from merchants and others who knew that there was security behind ; and now he was hastening home to put his affairs in order and resume that pleasant life of an English country gentleman, the thought of which had never been altogether absent from his mind. He had consented readily to bring over papers for one or two old friends of his father's, on the understanding that they were of a personal not a political character, and he had disguised himself and acted with secrecy, because strongly advised to do so by those who understood much better than he did what was the best course to pursue. In fact, he had been deceived first and last by men whose word he had trusted, and had, in ignorance of the state of parties in the country, acted with an imprudence that was likely to have fatal results.

Oliver listened in silence to the tale, and Maud's eyes seldom left his face. At the close there was a silence, which she broke.

“ If he were to tell all that to the judge and jury, would they not acquit him ? ”

“ No ; because they would not believe a word of it.”

“ That I well believe,” answered Rupert.

“ But he is not a traitor—”

"Men have died on the scaffold before now," said Rupert very quietly, "who have done less to warrant suspicion than I."

"You say truly," observed Oliver.

Maud's heart sank like lead, yet her eyes never left Oliver's face. She felt a sense of hope when she looked into it, the cause for which she could not define.

"To await the result of your trial in the hope of acquittal is plainly worse than useless; and the fulfilment of the sentence often falls so hard upon the judgment, that if aught is to be done, it must be done before that day. Maud, have you no plan? Did I not hear a rumour of escape?"

"I have thought of it by night and day for weeks, but no plan can be carried out till he is better. And he says it would be useless—" and Maud looked at Rupert, who repeated to Oliver some of the arguments he had brought forward in conversation not many days ago.

Oliver listened in silence.

"It would no doubt be a difficult and dangerous game, all the more so that the jailer, who is so pliable as a servant now, would be a violent adversary of any attempt to carry so lucrative a captive out of his clutches. Indeed it would hardly be safe to moot the question to such a fellow, and without his connivance the matter will be doubly difficult. But you are

wrong, Rupert, in thinking that, once free from Newgate, life would be useless to you. Funds for your present necessities shall be forthcoming if ever you do succeed in evading your jailers and standing a free man once more. And if you and your wife (whose connections will have weight) will but follow his Majesty and throw yourselves at his feet, I do not doubt but that pardon would quickly be extended to you. Whatever his ministers and judges may be, he is humane and merciful himself. He will doubtless be glad of a trusty soldier with a stout arm, for he has plenty of fighting before him, if report speaks true. But however that may be, you cannot do better than try to escape from this dismal place. Let us not be in haste with our plans, but mature them well. I have little doubt but that at last all will be well. Whatever else you doubt, however, do not doubt my good faith or friendship. I will stand by you to the last."

Then the brothers clasped hands and parted, and Maud led Oliver away. Her eyes were full of happy tears, for she felt as if in him they had found a tower of strength.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PLOT.

O LIVER'S cognizance of Rupert's existence in Newgate, and his approval of an attempt at effecting the prisoner's escape, seemed to give new life and reality to the project. Ever since Maud had found her husband, the idea of escape had been hovering like a vague phantom in the background of her mind ; but so far it had never taken any definite shape, nor did any plan even now suggest itself to her mind, though she racked her brains ceaselessly to find one. It seemed as if it would be impossible to act in such a matter with any chance of success without the jailer's co-operation ; and it was quite doubtful how far Fox would be willing to compromise himself in a way that must in the end come to the governor's ears, or connive at the escape of a prisoner who was now as a mine of wealth to him. True, a heavy bribe might tempt him ; but with a man of his character there was no security that he would not accept a bribe on the

one hand, yet give secret information in another quarter, so as to curry favour with the authorities and still retain his prisoner in his own hands. In point of fact, he was one of those inherently treacherous beings in whom it is impossible to place the least real confidence ; and the danger of even raising his suspicions by judicious sounding was so great that Maud shrank with instinctive repugnance and fear from the bare thought, and Oliver was forced to admit that, valuable and even indispensable as his assistance would be, it was not safe to hazard all by trusting to his good-will. It would not do for them to put their secret in any way in his power.

How to act without him was, however, a puzzle. He always kept a close watch upon the movements of visitors. He never permitted them to enter or to leave the prisoner's room without him. He made no objection to their visits, which were a source of revenue to him, but he always attended them jealously wherever they went ; and though he would leave them and the prisoner alone together safely locked up, sometimes for a considerable time, yet he would often return, thrust in his head to glance round and see that all was well. He must by this time have divined that something more than common humanity actuated Lady Maud in her care for this particular prisoner ; for although she visited others, and Gowrie did much

to ameliorate the condition of the miserable captives in the dark damp cells, Robert Moore was undoubtedly the object of their greatest solicitude, and Fox was cunning and cautious enough to keep a sharp look-out upon him. If he gained much more strength than he had done so far, and was able to leave his bed, the jailer hinted very plainly that duty would require him to put him into fetters again. The practice of fettering uncondemned and untried prisoners extended far into the following century.

Rupert was, of all concerned, the least hopeful of escape, because the most conscious of his own physical weakness. As he had truly said, a man does not quickly recover from the effects of such a six months' imprisonment as he had endured in his first cell; and the very pining for fresh air and liberty, inevitable to one of his habits and temperament, went far to increase his prostration and weakness. It seemed to him as if the springs of life, now running so low, could never be replenished to any purpose so long as he lay languishing in Newgate. Yet the impossibility of effecting an escape whilst in his present condition was only too patent to him. The only way by which it might be done under such conditions—feigning death and being removed in a coffin—was quite impracticable without the assistance of the jailer, and he, who knew the most of Fox, trusted him the least, and was urgent that

under no circumstances must any faith be put in him. Sometimes, when alone in his cell, he would rise from his bed and trail himself slowly across its narrow length ; but he soon found that after a few times his strength quite failed him, and he would sink down upon the bed breathless and exhausted. He began to sit up a few hours each day beside the fire about this time, and then, leaning on his wife's shoulder or Gowrie's arm, he managed better to take a little exercise; but the fact remained patent to all that he was fearfully weak, and could do almost nothing in his own cause, and for him to attempt escape in any of the ordinary ways, by filing his prison bars, overcoming his jailer by force and escaping in his clothes, or by any fashion that required strength and address, was obviously out of the question.

Rupert saw all this but too plainly, and would not allow his wife's confidence to enter too much into his own heart. He would smile fondly as she built her airy castles as to what they would do "when he was free ;" but he had little hopes of ever being free again, save by a way of which he never talked to her.

Maud was at this time cultivating with some assiduity the acquaintance of Lady Halifax, who appeared to have taken a decided fancy to her, and was fond of talking of her romantic history and condoling with her upon the sad mystery hanging over

her husband's fate. Lord Halifax, who was not at that time occupying any official position, was rather oddly placed as regards the feelings of the hostile factions. As Burnet truly said of him, "he went backwards and forwards, and changed sides so often, that in the conclusion no side would trust him;" so that the great Trimmer was left at last, politically speaking, somewhat stranded. But in his private capacity he had many friends on both sides and among all parties who respected his private character, which the same authority states to have been remarkable for the kindness and justice of his dealings. He was, too, a man of great and ready wit, though much given to satire; and both he and his wife were known to stand well with the Queen, who was at that time reigning alone, the King having gone abroad to look after the matters pertaining to his native land, and the war that was disturbing the whole continent of Europe.

Oliver had spoken to Maud of the possibility of following the absent monarch and gaining his pardon for her husband at a personal interview; but the girl began to see that Rupert, even if he succeeded in escaping from Newgate, would not be able to endure the fatigue of travel, still less of any kind of campaign. And the idea had suggested itself to her of obtaining the pardon, not of the King, but of the

Queen ; and if this was to be done, no one could so well aid and assist her as Lord and Lady Halifax.

The Marquis was kindly disposed towards the daughter of his old friend, and always took notice of her when she appeared at his house. Maud's beauty, which had always been considerable, had deepened and matured of late, and the anxiety through which she had passed had given to her face a kind of pathetic wistfulness which, underlying the outward sparkle and brightness, captivated many hearts. She did not know this herself, but she knew that people were very kind to her, Lord Halifax in particular ; and she knew very well from the character of the man that he would not think harshly of Rupert's indiscretion, and would be likely to look favourably upon an attempt to win his pardon from the sovereign.

But this plan Maud kept for the present to herself. The first thing was to get Rupert out of prison. If only that could be accomplished, she felt certain the rest would follow. Sometimes she wondered whether she could not obtain his pardon without running the risk of the attempted escape ; but a hint dropped from Oliver convinced her that it would be infinitely better to maintain perfect silence until her husband was outside prison walls—save, at least, as a last, despairing hope, should the plan of escape fail.

The reason for this secrecy was obvious. As the

answer of the sovereign was uncertain at best, it was far better that Rupert's identity should remain concealed. In telling the story to obtain pardon, the whole truth must be revealed ; and should the answer be unfavourable, attention would at once be drawn to the insignificant prisoner : Robert Moore would become Sir Rupert Melville ; very probably he might be transferred to the Tower ; and in any case all hope of escape would be over. Mr. Fells would feel it his duty to exclude his niece from the prison where her husband lay, and hope would be practically at an end.

Whereas if Rupert were free and in hiding, the result of the Queen's answer, though very important to his future prospects, would not be one of life or death. If the worst came to the worst, he could but fly the country ; whilst there was great hope that the romance of the story of danger and escape told by the lips of the young wife who had suffered and risked so much, would touch the kindly heart of the Queen (who was herself a devoted wife), and lead her to grant the petition so earnestly pleaded. Maud felt this when she turned matters over in her mind ; and she said again and again in her heart that she must and would save Rupert, and bring him out of his dungeon house.

But how was this to be accomplished ? Every day and every night plans and projects were turned over

in her busy brain, only to be rejected one by one, as impossible or too dangerous, or as making too great a demand on her husband's feeble powers. If only he was strong and active, how much easier it would be! But he made such slow, slow progress, and April was upon them. Whatever had to be done must be done quickly now.

And in the end it was faithful nurse Gowrie whose woman's wit hit upon the plan that was after all decided upon—a plan so simple and so practicable that the wonder was it had never occurred to any of them before.

“Dear heart, I see it all now as plain as daylight,” she said one day when they were discussing together what could possibly be done. “Sir Rupert shall walk clear out of the prison one of these days in my gown and cloak. We will pad him out with clothes to make him look stout, and with the hood drawn well over his face, as we always wear ours in coming and going, there's not a soul will know him in that dark underground place. I'm a tall woman as well as a stout one, and he stoops a trifle yet with his weakness. He can walk as far as the prison gates with your arm, and we must have some kind of a coach to meet him outside and carry him away. We can plan all that later; but get him out of the prison in my clothes, and the rest can't be so hard to plan.”

Maud clasped her hands together in breathless excitement.

“O Gowrie!” she exclaimed—“O Gowrie! how easy it sounds! But you, dear nurse, what will become of you?”

“Why, I shall stay behind, of course, wrapped up like a mummy in Sir Rupert’s bed, lest Fox should put his ugly face in when he lets the prisoner out. I shall like to see his face next morning when he finds the trick we have played him. But Sir Rupert will have had twelve hours’ start by that time, and they will be clever folks who catch him then!”

“But you, Gowrie, you?”

“I, dear heart; why, what can they do with an old woman like me but rail and scold and threaten? Hard words break no bones, and your uncle, though he will give me plenty of these, will take care I come to no harm. I suppose he will close the prison to me after that, and I shall be sorry for the poor folks who look to us for help and comfort; but, after all, we should not be here in any case when once Sir Rupert stands a free man, and if we have no Newgate folks to tend and cheer, we can all of us find some other good work to do.”

“O dear Gowrie! dear, faithful Gowrie! how can I thank you enough? Oh, if we should be able to save Rupert in that easy, easy way! I must talk to

Oliver. It seems as if it hardly could be done so simply. If only I was certain there would be no danger to you!"

Then the good woman held her young mistress in her arms, and said in tender tones, tremulous with tears :

" And if there were danger, which I do not believe there is, do you think I would not be glad and proud to face it? Are not you dear to me as my own child, if I may make bold to say it; and do I not love Sir Rupert, for your sake and his own, as if he were one of the children I have nursed? Did I not promise your lady mother to watch over you and guard you, and do all I could to unite you to your husband; and shall I falter now when it seems as if I might be the poor instrument of bringing you together in freedom and happiness? My dear, sweet, young mistress, if I were to die for it, I would do it gladly, and pray on my bended knees for leave to go if you wished to withstand me. As it is, I shall meet nothing more than hard words and reproaches; and do you think I shall heed them one whit?"

" O dear Gowrie! dear, dear Gowrie! how can we thank or love you enough?" cried Maud, the tears streaming down her face. " I will talk to Oliver to-night when he comes. We must do nothing without his sanction; but oh, I do think you have found out the way at last!"

"I hope so, dear heart, I hope so; I cannot see why it may not be done so. But talk to Mr. Oliver about it. A gentleman always knows best, and there will be ever so many things to think of. We must needs be very cautious. Mr. Oliver had better have the planning of it all. A gentleman brought up to the law is used to thinking of all kinds of things that we should never dream of."

Maud was ready enough to take this advice. She believed that the main difficulty had been solved by Gowrie, and that, disguised in her clothes, Rupert might be safely led out of the prison; but she knew that such a scheme would want very careful planning and thinking out, and that some head cooler and more experienced than her own would be required for that task. How thankful she was for her brother's lately promised assistance can be better imagined than described; and that same evening, when he paid one of his frequent visits, she took him aside into a separate room, and told him Gowrie's plan, begging his approval and support.

Oliver listened with great attention. She could not read his face, but the extreme gravity of his expression began at length to raise anxiety. She clasped her hands closely together and said,—

"O Oliver, do you not think that it is feasible? We thought it might surely be done with care and prudence."

"I think so too," he answered quietly. "I think that Rupert's escape might be so effected. The matter troubling me is the possible consequences to our good uncle. It would be ill requiting his kind hospitality, Maud, to get him embroiled with the sheriffs."

"But, Oliver, prisoners do escape often from Newgate, and my uncle does not get into trouble."

"An ordinary escape effected by the prisoner himself is one thing, but the substitution of a servant from my uncle's house altogether another. Who would believe but that the governor himself was conniving at the fraud when a discovery such as that was made known?"

"But why need it be made known? Would uncle be obliged to give particulars?"

"As a high-principled and honourable man he would be certain to do so. Fox would know all, and you can guess whether, apart from every other consideration, our uncle would care to place himself, so to speak, in the power of that miscreant. Undoubtedly he would furnish full particulars to the authorities, and what the consequences to himself might be no one can guess. Sometimes such offences are passed over very lightly; sometimes a great storm is aroused, the force of which it is difficult to estimate."

"But, Oliver, dear Oliver! you do not bid me give it up?"

"No, Maud, I do not. Rupert's life and safety must not be lightly passed over, and this plan seems undoubtedly the most feasible. Yet we must think of the possible danger both to Gowrie and our kinsman. An accusation of misprision of treason is no light matter, as doubtless you know."

Maud shivered, and clasped her hands closely together.

"O Oliver! what must we do?"

"That is what I am considering. It is very plain to me that we must take another person into our confidence. We cannot work this matter to a successful issue without the assistance of some one who, in an unofficial capacity, fully understands the working of the prison system and is acquainted with the jailers. In point of fact, we must have the assistance of our cousin Arthur."

"But, Oliver, do you think he would help us? His father—"

"It would be to prevent any kind of suspicion from attaching to his father that we principally want him, and I believe we may count upon him as an ally. You know what good friends you have always been, and what service you have done him in the matter of his courtship. He was saying to me only the other day that he attributed in a great measure his success in winning his father's consent to his betrothal with

Mistress Mary Mackenzie to the support you have always given him, and to your pleadings on his behalf. He added that he trusted some day to have the chance of repaying that service in kind ; and from the rather emphatic and significant way in which he spoke I could not help fancying that he perhaps had guessed a very little bit of our secret."

"He knows more about our visits to the prison than anybody else, for he often goes and chats with the jailers when he has nothing else to do. Oh, I wonder if he would help us ?"

"I believe he would do so gladly ; and I do not doubt that his acuteness and his knowledge of the prison will enable us to effect Rupert's escape in this disguise without bringing into too great danger either our faithful Gowrie or our good uncle. I am too great a stranger to be the least use inside the prison ; though I can work for you outside, and provide a safe asylum for Rupert as soon as he shall stand without the prison doors. But Arthur has exceptional advantages in obtaining access to the building, and that without exciting the least suspicion. I do not mean that I have a plan in my own head to suggest to him, but I believe he will be able to find out one for himself when once the matter is put before him."

"And when will that be ?" I asked, quivering with excitement.

"Before I leave to-night I will ask Arthur to bring you to my chambers to-morrow afternoon, as he has done before now. There we can be safe from any eavesdropping or molestation, and can discuss the matter at length. Be patient and courageous, dear sister. I believe your husband will be a free man before many weeks have passed."

Oliver's invitation to his sister and cousin excited no remark, and was accepted almost as a matter of course. At five o'clock Arthur called for Maud, and conducted her through the narrow streets to the more open and sunny neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn ; and only as they approached Oliver's rooms did he show any consciousness that there was something of an exciting nature hanging over them. He turned to Maud, then took her trembling hand in his, and said with a reassuring smile,—

"We have always been friends from the first, sweet coz ; are you afraid to trust me now ? "

"Oh no, no!" answered Maud quickly ; "you would never betray trust, Arthur ? "

"Never !" he answered emphatically. "I will help you, if I can, with all my heart and soul ; but betray you—surely you need not fear that ? "

"No, no ! I do not ! I do not ! If we did not trust you, we should not have brought you here."

And then they turned in at a door and mounted to

Oliver's pleasant first-floor chambers, where the young man lived in considerable luxury, though of a quiet and unostentatious kind.

It was plain from Maud's pale looks and subdued excitement of manner that it would be idle to appear unconscious of the great purpose that had brought the conspirators together. Oliver carefully closed and locked the door, made his guests comfortable in the easiest of easy chairs, and then, with a glance at Maud, to read her final permission, he proceeded to give to Arthur a detailed account of the finding of Sir Rupert, together with an outline of the proposed plan of escape.

Arthur listened with profound attention, asking pertinent questions at intervals, some of which were answered by Oliver and some by Maud. When the whole story of Rupert's imprisonment and consequent illness had been duly reported, then came the project for effecting his escape, which, owing to his enfeebled state, could only be done in a way that should require no exertion upon his part. Oliver plainly stated his own reluctance and Maud's to do anything that should get Mr. Fells into trouble with the authorities, and told Arthur that they had appealed to him in the hope that he would see a way out of the difficulty.

"In point of fact, it comes to this," concluded Oliver, "Gowrie must be left in the cell in place of

Rupert; but she must not be found there in the morning. Can you devise any plan by which she can be spirited away?"

Arthur sat lost in thought.

"That secret way from my father's house ought to serve us," he said.

"Yes, ought it not? It will serve Rupert at least," said Maud quickly.

"I think not," was Arthur's answer. "I believe the best plan for him will be to go straight out by the gateway. Rupert disguised as Gowrie could never set foot in my father's house without imminent risk of detection. Anybody might come and speak to her—or him—unexpectedly, and all would be undone."

The listeners saw that, but it seemed to complicate matters. Maud began to speak, but Arthur checked her with a gesture.

"Give me time," he said, leaning his head on his hands, as if to shut out all outside impressions—"give me time. I have not amused myself by planning imaginary escapes for nothing. I have a vast number of ideas to draw upon. Let me alone a minute. I begin to see a little light."

They left him alone, and for full twenty minutes there was silence in the room. At the end of that time Arthur looked up.

"I think I have it now. Listen, both of you, closely,

and see if you can find a flaw anywhere. It is the tenth of April—a week from to-day. At about seven o'clock, just before dusk, Gowrie wishes to visit a sick prisoner, and enters the jail in the usual way under the gateway. She sees Dobbs, and afterwards Fox, who takes her to Rupert's cell, where the exchange of dress is effected—or rather where he is arrayed in a corresponding suit of clothes, which must be taken in piece by piece from this time and hidden in the bedding or under the floor. He must also have practised walking in petticoats, as men have betrayed themselves before now by their awkwardness in woman's disguise. At about half-past seven, a messenger arrives in somewhat hot haste from you, Oliver, to say that you have had a bad fall downstairs and hurt yourself, and desire Gowrie's immediate presence. I am at hand when the message arrives, and volunteer to fetch Gowrie from the prison. I go to Dobbs, who hands me on to Fox, and I tell Dobbs meantime to fetch a coach quickly, as Mr. Oliver Lifford is very ill and requires Gowrie's immediate attendance. I tell him this so that, if Gowrie appears feeble and weak in getting into the coach, it will be attributed to her emotion, and I can say cheering things to her as I assist her in. I go with Fox to the prisoner's cell, and he, being somewhat embarrassed by my knowledge of his disobedience to orders in admitting visi-

tors to other prisoners than debtors, will be more awed than usual and less likely to be noticing; moreover, the passages are exceedingly dark. I shall only just look into the room, call Gowrie quickly out, and lead her away, talking all the time of need for haste and the accident that has befallen Oliver. If she appears agitated or trembling, it will cause no special remark, even if observed. Dobbs will have a coach awaiting us, and we shall drive off together to Oliver's rooms. There Rupert can effect a change of dress and slip away unmolested to the place we shall have in readiness for him, where he can lie hidden as long as may be necessary. Oliver must manage that part of the business, for I must return to Newgate. I shall then go and give a piece of my mind to Fox, who will be very humble, in terror lest he is about to lose his revenue from this prisoner. I shall relent at length, and make the peace by producing a bottle of spirits (well drugged), which he and I will proceed to enjoy together. He, no doubt, will do full justice to it, and the effect will be that he will shortly be in my power. I shall take care that we are in a room alone; and when he is asleep, I shall take his keys, release Gowrie, and restore them to him before he awakes. Gowrie will come into my father's house by the private door, and try to get out again into the street, without being seen, in which case she will go to

Oliver's chambers, where she is supposed to be. If, however, she is seen, she must be ready with a story of having returned to fetch some choice specific of her own for bruises, and go off with it as naturally as she can. Most likely, when Fox finds next morning that his prisoner has escaped, he will suspect a plot and my connivance in it. He can, however, prove nothing, and will be afraid to tell my father the whole truth lest his own dismissal be the result. I shall pretend to be good-naturedly solicitous for him in his dilemma. I shall suggest that he consign Robert Moore to the grave. My father will be away all the day of the eleventh on municipal business, and we can get an imaginary corpse coffined, and even buried without much trouble. As no such person exists as Robert Moore, I confess I shall have little scruple in vouching to my father that he is no more; and it will be a good thing to have that worthy safely out of the way underground. As he has twice been too ill to appear at his trial, the news of his death will awaken no surprise, and no question of escape will ever arise with the authorities. That is my plan, and it is for you to say whether or not you will accept and play it out or not."

"O Arthur, Arthur!" cried Maud, in a kind of ecstasy, "I believe it is the best plot that ever was made in all the world!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ESCAPE.

Autobiographical fragment by Lady Maud Melville.

I THINK no week of my life stands out with such clear distinctness as the one preceding the escape of my dear husband from his cell in Newgate. As he did not gain strength enough for him to make the attempt by force in any form, it had to be accomplished by strategy; and to faithful Gowrie, in the first instance, and afterwards to Arthur, did we owe the clever scheme that resulted in his liberation. But I think I hardly ate or slept all that interminable week, during which we thought out again and again every detail of the plan, and even rehearsed with one another many of the scenes, that we might be sure to act them with becoming ease and composure when the moment should arrive. So much depended on all going perfectly smoothly—Rupert's life, Gowrie's safety, my uncle's official reputation, and Arthur's credit too, though he laughed at the idea of any

personal risk—and so many well-concerted schemes had broken down in some inexplicable fashion over the veriest trifles. Suppose ours should do the same? The fear of involving my kind uncle and still kinder aunt in any sort of trouble was an added difficulty and complication; but Arthur was so cheerful, and Oliver so quietly reassuring, that I plucked up heart of grace, and I prayed so earnestly that success and blessing might attend our efforts (for I *could* not feel that we were acting wrongly in God's sight in attempting the rescue of one so unjustly imprisoned), that I felt as if they could not fail; for had not my heartfelt prayers been hitherto answered, and that in a most wonderful way?

The question that had arisen as to a hiding-place for Rupert was settled again by Arthur, and that in a very simple way. He came to me one day, about eight-and-forty hours after the memorable interview in Oliver's chambers, and said,—

“I hope you will not blame me, good coz, or brand me as a traitor, if I tell you that I have taken into our confidence good Mrs. Mackenzie and my sweet Mary.”

“O Arthur, why?”

“Because I have taken rooms for Rupert in the obscure lodging-house where they dwell. He will need some kind friends to look after him and tend

him till he is fit to escape to the Continent, and win his pardon from the King, according to Oliver's project; and I know not where he can obtain it better than at the hands of those sweet ministering angels. They know all, and your secret is as safe with them as it is buried in your own heart. Mrs. Mackenzie will watch over him like a mother. He will pass in the house as a sick nephew of hers, one Rupert Mackenzie, come to London to consult a leech; and in the purer air of the sunny room we have secured for him high up, he should gain strength and vigour far more rapidly than he could hope to do in Newgate. The only two places where he could be, in which you could visit him with any kind of freedom, are Oliver's chambers and the house where the Mackenzies dwell. The former place is out of the question, for glad as your brother would be to entertain him, the secret could never be kept there. Cottingham, who is now in town, might surprise him there at any moment, or others might see him who would ask difficult questions. In an obscure lodging off Holborn, accepted as a relative of our good Quaker friends, no one could be more safe, and you need have no fear that they will betray him by any indiscretion. They have both learned caution in a hard school of necessity and peril, when the gloom of prison life threatened them simply for the Christian faith they professed."

If I had felt a momentary sense of reluctance at parting with our secret to any one else, I was speedily reassured by these words, and I saw at once that Arthur had judged kindly and wisely both for Rupert and myself. He would need more care and attention than an ordinary lodger in an obscure place could expect; and of course there would be great difficulties in the way of my seeing him without exciting suspicion if he were in any place save one I was in the habit of visiting. As the spring was now advancing, my visits to Mrs. Mackenzie would excite no remark either at my uncle's house or at the one for which I was bound, and I could see Rupert almost as freely as I would, and without any danger to him or to myself.

The hardest part of that week was the keeping the secret from my husband till the last moment. But he was in too weak a state to bear prolonged excitement or suspense, and it was only on the day before that we told him all the plan, and dressed him up in the clothes we had smuggled in, and put him through his part. Arthur had wanted him to rehearse oftener, but when he understood how very weak he still was he had agreed that he had better remain in ignorance till almost the last. A week of such suspense and alternations of hope and fear would be certain to tell unfavourably upon him; and besides we wished to have every detail planned to a nicety before we spoke

a single word to him. It was well we did so, for if I had not felt fully assured that no harm would come to Gowrie or any one else concerned in helping him, I do not believe we should have won his consent. His own hard experiences had given him such a horror of the clutches of the law that I believe he would sooner have died than have condemned any one to a fate such as his had been. As it was, however, our plans were so complete, and Arthur's position gave him such certainty of success in the matter of releasing Gowrie, that he consented with scarce an objection after the first; and when once he had realized that he might be a free man by that time the following day, a new strength and spirit seemed to possess him. I think I never fully realized before how passionately he had craved for liberty, and how brave and self-restrained he had shown himself.

We agreed that I should not see him next day. He was afraid of anything that might upset his composure, and I was afraid of growing over-excited myself. Gowrie was to come at noon to be locked in during the jailer's dinner-hour, when Fox never disturbed them, to go through the dressing process once more, and "put him through his paces," as Arthur phrased it. He was then to feign an increase of illness, and Fox was to be cautioned to look well to him, Gowrie promising to come again about seven

with a composing draught which she hoped would insure sleep. She told Fox that she had a sick debtor to see first, and would enter the prison by the ordinary way, to which he made no objection, as long as she did it quietly.

How my heart beat when I heard all this from Gowrie after the visit that was so nearly the last. That afternoon I was so excited and restless that, afraid of rousing my aunt's suspicion or provoking questions, I asked leave to visit Mrs. Mackenzie, who was still confined to the house with stiffness and weakness of the joints. Gowrie attended me, and we bought several little things on our way to add to Rupert's comfort in his new home.

When we reached our destination, Mary met me with open arms, and took us at once to see the pleasant rooms near to the roof that had been provided for Rupert. Arthur, with his usual thoughtful care, had sent things from the warehouse, such as curtains and a carpet and table-cover, to make them warm and cheerful and home-like ; and when I contrasted their sunny brightness with the gloom of that dim room in Newgate, the tears rushed to my eyes, and I could only clasp Mary round the neck and sob as if my heart were breaking instead of bursting with joy.

Dear Mary, however, seemed to understand it all,

and encouraged me to cry ; and the burst of tears did me a great deal of good, and helped me to feel calmer than I had been able to do all day before. Then we went in to see Mrs. Mackenzie, and she talked so sweetly and tenderly to me that I felt more and more tranquil and composed ; and when she told me that she and Mary had never ceased to pray for the successful liberation of the poor captive, then I felt assured in my heart that our plans would not miscarry. So many heartfelt prayers must surely be heard before the Mercy Seat.

We went back after a somewhat lengthened visit, and found that Arthur was home before us. He asked me of our visit to Mrs. Mackenzie, and if they had heard exactly when their sick kinsman was expected. I answered that he was to arrive that evening, according to the best of their belief ; and then I sat down beside my aunt and took my needle-work, whilst my uncle sat down in his arm-chair and read us extracts from the *London Gazette* that had been published that day. Arthur lounged beside the window in the gathering dusk, and discussed various items of news with his father in his usual indolent way.

At exactly half-past seven a note was brought up for me, which I opened quickly, and then started to my feet. " Oliver has met with an accident. He has

fallen downstairs and bruised and hurt himself. He wants Gowrie to go to him. Oh, I hope he is not really hurt! I must go and find her and tell her."

"I'll go," answered Arthur. "I saw her a little while back passing under the gateway into the prison, and she hasn't come out yet. No doubt she has gone to cosset up some of her sick pets. I will run and fetch her out. Do not be over-anxious, Maud—how white you look! I daresay it is nothing. Fellows like us make a deal of fuss about nothing."

Arthur disappeared, and I went to his former post at the little oriel window overlooking Holborn and the prison gates, and stood there with a heart beating to suffocation. I opened one of the lattices and leaned out into the darkening night. The voices of my uncle and aunt discussing Oliver's fall seemed to reach me from an immeasurable distance.

I felt like one moving in a dream—a dream that has become so familiar that one knows one is dreaming even whilst unable to break the spell. I saw Dobbs run quickly out of the gateway to summon the coach, and presently the unwieldy vehicle came rumbling up to the gate. Then there was a little pause, during which my heart beat so hard that I felt as if Dobbs in the street below could and must hear it. At last from beneath the greater gloom of the gateway two figures appeared—one my cousin

Arthur, the other a cloaked and hooded female form, so portly, so exactly like Gowrie, that for an instant my heart seemed to stand still. Then I heard Arthur's voice :—

“ Now don't give way, my good woman ; there is nothing to be alarmed at. We shall be with him almost directly now ;” and looking up to the window where I was leaning out, he took off his hat and waved it, calling out, “ All's right, Maud ; I am going too. I'll bring you back good news ; you see if I do not speak truly.”

Then the coach lumbered away in the darkness, and such a mist came before my eyes that for a few moments I did not know where I was or what had happened. What roused me was the feel of my uncle's hand on my shoulder.

“ My dear child, you are not really anxious about Oliver, are you ? Cheer up, my wench !—Why, look at the child, good wife ! her face is as white as your kerchief there.”

But with a little tremulous laugh I hid my face on my kind uncle's shoulder, and put my arms closely round him. Somehow I felt an intense love for him at that moment. Was it not in a way his doing that Rupert was safe away outside Newgate ? Had it not been for his kind, generous hospitality, as well as his humanity of disposition, I should never have

found a shelter beneath his roof for all these long months, and should certainly have never gained access to the gloomy prison where my dear husband was confined.

"Dear, dear uncle," I whispered, "you are so very kind to me always. I do not know how to thank you enough."

I daresay he was surprised at this little outburst of feeling, called out apparently by nothing; but I think he was pleased and touched by it, as men often are who are not by nature at all demonstrative or accustomed to give or receive caresses.

"Come, come, little one! come, come! Cheer up, pretty child. Oliver will be all right; never fear. What is a fall downstairs to a strapping young fellow like that? Run away now and put on a pretty gown, for I am expecting some company very soon. Your friend Mr. Chalcote will no doubt look in, and perhaps he will bring you news from home."

I was glad to run away to the shelter of my room, and when once there, to throw myself upon my knees and give thanks to the Heavenly Father for the deliverance accorded us. True, all was not yet accomplished; but the worst of the peril was past, and by far the most difficult part of the enterprise had been successfully carried through. My heart was bounding with joy. After the long suspense

of the week, charged as it had been with fears of failure and exposure, I could hardly believe that I was not now the victim of some delusive dream. Yet in my heart of hearts I *knew* that Rupert was beyond his prison walls. I heard again the peculiar vibration of Arthur's voice as he had waved his hat and cried, "All's right." What these two words meant to me would be impossible to describe.

The colour had come back to my cheeks and the light to my eyes when I went back to the withdrawing-room. I was only afraid I should look too happy and bright, too indifferent to the accident that was supposed to have befallen Oliver. There were several people in the room when I got down, and amongst them Mr. Chalcote. He came forward at once, and his first words sufficed to bring back an anxiety, this time not feigned.

"I have just come from your brother's chambers. Mrs. Fells tells me that you have had news of his accident. He has broken his arm falling down some stairs, but is not otherwise hurt. The surgeon was leaving as I heard the news. He says there is nothing to cause alarm. It is a simple fracture, and will mend quickly. I did not see Oliver, as the leech had prescribed quiet, but I gathered enough to assure me that there was no cause for anxiety."

I listened with some surprise and fear, not

knowing how much of this story to believe. It seemed strange that Oliver should really have met with an accident at this precise juncture, and yet he could hardly deceive a surgeon into the belief that he had broken a bone. I was perplexed and somewhat anxious and disturbed; but this was thought natural enough under the circumstances, and provoked no comment.

We went to supper shortly, and sat a good while over the festive board. We were rather a large party, and there was a great deal of animated and witty conversation. We remained a long time at the table after the supper had really ended, listening to a war of words between a tragedian and a comic actor, who were discussing with keen interest some points of stage tradition that seemed to them of great importance. I did not attend to them, however; I had other matters on my mind. My ears were intently listening for any sounds that should indicate the return of Arthur after his complex offices had been performed. We had reckoned that if all went well he might be expected to return shortly after ten o'clock, and the hands of the timepiece were approaching that hour as we rose at last from table and returned to the upstairs room.

Late hours were rather in vogue at my uncle's house, and often his parties did not break up before

eleven. I began to feel confident that Gowrie had succeeded in passing unobserved through the house, as I should probably have been informed had she been supposed to have returned to seek some specific on Oliver's behalf. The strain of anxiety and waiting began to produce a sense of numb weariness that was rather restful than otherwise: I do not think that any one guessed me to be in a ferment of excitement. I appeared merely a little preoccupied and grave, as was natural under the circumstances.

Several of the guests had departed, Mr. Chalcote amongst them; but two or three more were still engaged in conversation with my uncle, when the door opened and Arthur came quietly in. I do not suppose any one else would have observed it, but to my eyes he wore the air of a man who has gone through a rather severe mental strain. There was a weariness in his eyes and unconscious stern compression of the lips, though these indications were so slight that I do not think I should have observed them had my own senses not been wound up to an unusual pitch of tension.

As he came in his eyes for a moment sought mine, and he made a very slight preconcerted signal to tell me all was well. Then he shook hands with our friends, answering at the same time in pleasant and easy fashion the inquiries about Oliver which we all pressed upon him.

It was as Mr. Chalcote had said. Oliver had had a fall, and had broken his arm. He was a little feverish, but nothing to be alarmed at, and Gowrie was going to stay the night with him. The bone had been set, and the inflammation was only slight. He would like me to visit him to-morrow; and in a few days he would be able to go about as usual.

After all that had been publicly stated, it surprised no one that I should go with Arthur into the little inner room and hear fuller particulars in private.

“All has gone excellently, Maud,” said Arthur in very low tones, as he drew the curtain over the entrance to our retreat. “The only point to be regretted is that Oliver in his determination not to raise suspicion, or give rise to awkward questions by sending needlessly for Gowrie, overdid his part, and really broke his arm. He was resolved that he would contrive an awkward fall, which should give him bruises and contusions enough to account for a desire for Gowrie’s ministrations; but when he precipitated himself downstairs, which he appears to have done with a cool recklessness very characteristic of him, he came to the bottom with more force than he anticipated, with the result that he broke his arm a little above the wrist. He declares, however, that it is a lucky accident, as he can keep Gowrie nominally with him, and really spare her to Rupert as much as he re-

quires ; and you can visit him frequently, spending a large proportion of your time in the Holborn lodging, where Rupert is now safely established."

" He is really safe there ! O Arthur, how can I thank you ? Tell me—tell me all ! "

" There is not really much to tell. Everything went off just as we had planned—in a most wonderful way. Rupert was metamorphosed into such an excellent facsimile of Gowrie that when he came to me at the prison door I could hardly believe, till I felt myself clutched by a thin, long hand, that there had not been a mistake. No kind of suspicion entered Fox's head. He was confused, as I expected, at my sudden appearance and my knowledge of his corrupt practices. There was no difficulty in getting free of the prison and to Oliver's lodgings, where a change of clothes was waiting for Rupert. It was a little more difficult to smuggle him out again unseen, and to account for Gowrie's disappearance, by pretending that she had slipped round to a neighbouring apothecary for some particular recipe of her own she desired made up. But Oliver's servant was busy and confused, and of course not in the least disposed to be suspicious, and we were quite successful in both of these matters. The main difficulty was caused by Rupert's weakness, which, after the excitement and exertion of the escape, amounted to positive exhaus-

tion. He was almost failing before we got upstairs, and for a few minutes I doubted if he would be able to get further that night. Oliver, however, had luckily thought of that, and had provided strong restoratives, and Rupert's firm resolve to get the better of physical weakness was a great help. Then Oliver had arranged for a coach to be in readiness for us at a quiet back entry, through which we could get away unobserved; and so, without any real difficulty or over-much danger, I got him to Mrs. MacKenzie's lodging. Once there, all trouble was at an end, for a sick man was expected, and no one was surprised at his feebleness. I left him when I had seen him safe to his room, knowing that he was in good hands; and I was in haste to get back to the prison to keep an eye on Fox. He was sullen and shamefaced at first; but after I had rebuked him somewhat strongly for his covetousness and cupidity, I let him see that I did not think there was any great harm in allowing the visits of ministering angels to the poor wretches who certainly needed it most sorely. He took heart of grace then, and I presently produced my bottle: it was not the first time I had indulged Fox and others in a glass of spirits when the day's work was done. He drank freely, as I expected, and the effect was soon perceptible in great drowsiness, ending at length in profound slumber. The release

of Gowrie was then easy. She crept unseen through the house, and after I had returned his keys to the sleeping Fox, I conducted her to Oliver's chambers and left her there. The only thing now is to try to prevent the discovery of the escape until my father has got off in the morning, which he will do shortly after nine o'clock. I think Fox will sleep late after his potations, and as we have dressed up the bolster and laid it in effigy in Rupert's bed in an admirably life-like pose, I doubt if, in the dim, uncertain light, he will discover the absence of his prisoner at the first entrance into the room. His head will be heavy and confused, and very likely it may be mid-day before he suspects that any trick has been played."

"O Arthur ! how can I thank you ? We owe everything in the world to you !"

He laughed, and bid me good-night; and I went to bed, but not to sleep. I was too happy for dreams to visit my pillow. I lay awake till daylight came, thinking of Rupert.

Next morning my uncle went off soon after nine o'clock on business that would detain him all day, and in the afternoon my aunt received a little note telling her that he had to go on to Greenwich on a matter of importance, and should not be home before the following evening.

I did not, however, know this till supper-time, as my day was spent between Oliver's chambers and Rupert's lodgings ; and I think, in the strange excitement of meeting my dear husband outside his prison walls, I forgot everything else. Rupert was in bed, and exhausted by the excitement of yesterday and by two sleepless nights ; but he looked more like his old self than I had ever before seen him, and he said that to lie and look at the sunshine and the blue sky, to feel the spring breeze fan his face from the open lattice, and to know that nothing but his own feebleness hindered his walking out into the streets again a free man, was such happiness and delight that it was certain to work a cure, and that before very long. He did not thank me—he said he could not, and should not even try—but he held my hand close in his all the time I sat beside him, and his eyes looked into mine in a way that kept bringing the tears rushing into them. Then he would smile his own bright smile of old days, and say,—

“ Little wife, dear little wife, kiss me once more, sweetheart. Let me feel that it is true, that you are not part of a sweet dream.”

It was such a strange, happy day. I can never forget it as long as I live.

I spent some hours with Oliver, though he protested he did not want me. He was very cool and dry as

usual, and ridiculed himself and all of us for the trouble we had taken and the risk we had run all for "one worthless prisoner;" but I could see that he was as pleased and proud of our success as any one, and thought a broken arm cheaply purchased if it had been of real service to the cause, as I think it had.

He told me that Rupert, though in one sense out of danger, must not attempt to show himself abroad even should his strength return. There would be danger, in such close proximity to Newgate, of his being recognized as Robert Moore, and in other quarters, danger of his being identified as Rupert Melville. His plan must be to lie close till his health was restored, then to escape to some remote part of the kingdom or to the Continent, and obtain a pardon for Rupert Melville before he ventured to show his face. To this I agreed willingly, though saying nothing of my own private plan. That for the present I intended to keep to myself. Others had contrived Rupert's escape; it was for his wife, as I often told myself, to procure his pardon.

I did not ask Arthur anything about Fox or the escape when I got home, and he said nothing to me. The whole thought of the prison had become like a kind of nightmare, and I was glad not to have it recalled. Next day was spent very much as the pre-

vious one had been. My aunt went with me to see Oliver, who was up and dressed, and looking much as usual, save for his helpless arm. She left me in my brother's chamber, and soon afterwards Gowrie took me again to Rupert. Dear Gowrie! how I did hug her when first we met after the escape. She was as pleased and proud at our success as if it had been she who was the prisoner, and nothing delighted her more than to hear us say that we owed it all to her. She would laugh, and tell us it was Mr. Arthur's cleverness; but we all knew that she had played the most important part, that we could hardly have carried through such a plan but for her, and that the original idea was hers.

On the evening of the second day my uncle was home again, and after supper he said to Arthur,—

“Fox tells me that the prisoner Robert Moore died on the night of the tenth, and that you authorized the burial. It is so, I presume?”

“Yes, sir; I meant to tell you about it. I heard it shortly after you had left, and went to the cell before the coffin was closed. I authorized the man to close it then, as the air of the room was very foul. I did not know it had actually been buried, but all was in order.”

“Well, well, he only escaped a worse fate. I never thought he would live to be tried when he was brought

in so badly wounded. Newgate air does not agree with the sick. I would have visited him, though, had I known he was likely to die; but really, with so many hundreds of prisoners, one cannot keep each individual in mind. I hope he did not suffer brutal neglect at the last."

"No; I ascertained that myself. Fox had moved him out of a stone cell into his own warder's room. I think there had been no needless harshness at the last."

"Ah well, I am glad of that. Doubtless it has been a merciful release for him. Poor things, poor things! prisoners have a sad life of it. Well, Robert Moore at least is free of Newgate."

Arthur and I exchanged one glance, but not a word on the subject was spoken between us.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE QUEEN.

Autobiographical fragment continued.

FROM the hour that my husband left his dismal prison-cell, and was able to look upon the blue sky and yellow sunshine, and breathe the pure air of liberty, he began slowly and steadily to recover his health, and to increase in strength with every day that passed. He would stand for an hour together at the open lattice of his high window, drinking in, as it were, the balmy air of spring that fanned his wan cheeks, till the colour slowly returned to them, and seemingly absolutely and perfectly content with just the knowledge that he was free, without the least wish to test his freedom by any further acts requiring greater exertion. He was not strong enough for some little time to feel any overmastering desire to walk abroad, and the chance of possible recapture, when suggested to him, was quite sufficient to keep him within doors. He had the range not only of his own

two apartments, which, after Newgate, seemed spacious indeed, but he was cordially welcomed to make any use he liked of those rooms occupied by Mrs. MacKenzie and Mary, whose kinsman he was supposed to be. He soon began to take his meals with them, and after his long dreary captivity the pleasant intercourse with his fellowmen was inexpressibly sweet. I saw him almost every day, sometimes spending long hours in his company, hours that endeared us more and more to one another as each day fled by. Oliver and Arthur were also frequent guests, and Gowrie looked upon him almost as her own boy.

We had no difficulty on the score of money. I had still a good portion remaining of the five hundred guineas that had done us such signal service, and Oliver, who was making a considerable income at the bar, was generally anxious to supply us with funds. His idea was still that Rupert should go abroad as soon as he was well enough, and obtain the King's pardon, and attach himself warmly to his cause, and, if possible, be near his person during the remainder of the campaign. We had ascertained that there was a warrant out for the arrest of Sir Rupert Melville (Oliver suspected that Cottingham had had a hand in that, as nothing was really known about him save that he had visited the court at Saint Germain), so that it was out of the question for him to appear

openly unless a pardon could be first obtained ; and Rupert was as eager as any one to follow and find the King, and plead his own cause with him face to face.

I listened to all these plans and kept my own counsel, for I did not wish to speak of my private project until it had been submitted to the only person whose help would be of value to me. Indeed, I had not decided whether I should mention the matter at all until the experiment had actually been tried. If I failed, possibly Oliver and Arthur might say I had damaged our cause by precipitation ; but if I succeeded ?

And I believed that if I could only see the Queen I should succeed. She was herself such a devoted wife, that surely her heart would be touched by the prayers of a wife pleading for her husband's liberty and life. And then it was not as if Rupert had really been guilty of treason or any crime ; it was only the cruel harshness and injustice of the law and the severity of the judges that put us in such fear. So many, many innocent heads had fallen, that it seemed hopeless to trust to innocence when brought before legal tribunals ; we felt that even perpetual exile and poverty would be preferable to running so great a risk.

I have spoken before of the kindness and goodwill of Lord and Lady Halifax, and it was to their good

offices I looked to obtain for me an audience of the Queen. I heard of her frequently when I visited the stately mansion where the marquis lived. She was living very quietly and much alone at Kensington Palace, conducting the affairs of the kingdom with great skill and zeal, but caring only moderately for the social distractions that many women would have courted to beguile their loneliness. She was not on really cordial terms with the Princess Anne, and took little pleasure in her society, nor did she make close friends of her own. She seemed to have no room in her heart for any friendships of the ordinary kind, all her love being given to her husband.

Lady Halifax visited her from time to time, and was always kindly received. When the Queen gave one of her small receptions, Lord and Lady Halifax were generally included in the list of invited guests, and they always spoke of her majesty with affection.

To Lady Halifax I at length confided the whole history of the discovery and escape of Rupert, telling her everything, in fact, save his present place of concealment, which I was resolved to betray to no one, and ending with my great wish to obtain an audience of the Queen and implore from her a pardon for an innocent and uncondemned man.

Lady Halifax listened with the utmost interest to the tale. She knew all about my early marriage, and

the persecution and banishment I had suffered for my resolution to be faithful to Rupert. She had always appeared to sympathize kindly with me, and what she called the "romance" of my story had attracted her from the first. Now she listened with quite a breathless air of expectancy, and when I had told her all she threw her arms round my neck and laughed and almost cried, and declared she had never heard such a delightfully romantic story in all her life. She appeared altogether taken out of herself with admiration and pleasure.

She was quite of my opinion that a personal interview with the Queen would be the best way of settling the matter, and I could see that she felt very hopeful that her Majesty's goodwill and clemency would be exerted on my behalf; but she was too cautious to promise me anything definite. She said it would be necessary to consult her husband, but that I should hear from her in a few days; and then she dismissed me with more affection than usual, and sent me away glad and hopeful, but in a state of almost painful suspense. This suspense lasted for more than a week, during which time I heard nothing from Lady Halifax, and was forced to keep my own counsel—or rather to restrict my confidence to faithful Gowrie, from whom I found it impossible to keep a secret. She was delighted at the idea of my seeing the Queen, and

was absolutely certain of success if only I could do so. Her confidence was a great comfort to me, for sometimes my own courage felt almost like to wane.

And at last, one bright evening in May, a note was brought to me from Lady Halifax. It only contained a few words, and those words bid me be at her mansion at two o'clock the next day. I was told to put on my best attire, and to bring Gowrie as my attendant. Not a word was spoken about the Queen or Rupert, but my heart beat very fast as I read the words, for I felt as if another crisis of my life was at hand.

No objection was made to this expedition,—my movements were never interfered with. When we reached the door of Lady Halifax's mansion the next day, at the appointed hour, we found her own most stately coach drawn up before the door; and hardly had we alighted before she herself appeared, dressed with great care and some magnificence, and beckoned me to take the vacant seat beside her in the coach.

“Gowrie and my attendant will follow,” she explained, and it was some little time before I ventured to ask,—

“Where are we going?”

“To Kensington Palace,” was the quiet answer; and though I asked no more questions, I knew that I was to see the Queen, and my heart began to beat with a sense of suffocation, for I felt as if the whole of our

future destiny hung upon the events of the next hour, and that upon the impression I should make and my eloquence in pleading rested Rupert's chances of life and death.

It was well I had rehearsed in my mind so many times all I had meant to say to the Queen, or surely I should have been unable to do it now. I could think of nothing connectedly as we drove along, and the bare idea of being admitted to the presence of royalty frightened me at the last. I had never been at court, never been presented to the sovereign ; and though I had once been kissed by a king, and had made him a saucy retort, that had been in the days of my early childhood—on my wedding-day at least—and it did not give me any confidence for the interview I felt approaching.

I was so pre-occupied and confused that I have never been able to recall distinctly our arrival at the palace, nor any details about the place itself. I only recollect that we were presently ushered into a spacious ante-room, where, after a short delay, Lady Halifax left me, whilst she followed a page to some other apartment. I had intended asking her a few questions about the proper modes of address to a sovereign, and the deportment expected to be observed in the royal presence ; but I had not, so far, been able to frame my inquiries, and she had not attempted to

harass or disturb me by a single injunction or caution. Indeed, she had been at the same time unusually silent and unusually tender, and I had felt that her true sympathy was with me, which was most comforting and sustaining.

I sat with clasped hands in the room where we had been left, feeling just as if this were part of a dream, but with an agitation and excitement of mind only experienced in real life. I could not speak to Gowrie, or answer her low-toned comments of admiration at the beauties of the palace garden, seen from the window, or her endeavours to reassure and encourage my failing spirit. I had no idea how time passed by; I only knew that presently another door opened in the room and admitted Lady Halifax.

"Come, my child," she said, touching me on the shoulder. "Her Majesty is graciously pleased to grant you a private audience."

I said not a word, but rose and followed my guide into the adjoining room, which was very spacious and magnificent. But all I saw there was the one figure which the room contained—a woman's figure, slight yet full of dignity, instinct with that air of unconscious power that so often bespeaks royalty of birth. The Queen was seated in a chair at the far end of the room. She was dressed simply, yet with great taste, in a long robe of Indian silk, and her hair was piled

high on her head, and partly concealed by a drapery of costly lace that descended on each side of her face—a fashion of head-dress much in favour at the time, and very becoming to her. Her neck and arms were bare, and she held a fan in her hand, and a beautiful jewel secured the shoulder-knot of ribbon she wore. If I live to be a hundred, I think I can never forget every detail of the queenly figure as I saw it that bright May day, with the golden sunshine flooding the great apartment as I was ushered in. I met the gaze of her clear, penetrating eyes fixed steadily upon me; and then—I do not know how it was—all my preconcerted words, all the dignity and decorum I had struggled after so sedulously, every spark of courage and self-possession, seemed to desert me, and when I reached the Queen and saw her hand graciously extended for me to kiss, all I could do was to throw myself down on my knees before her and burst into a passion of tears.

I cannot think what made me disgrace myself thus, for I was not usually moved easily to tears; but the excitement and the strain of feeling had been severe, and when once I had begun to weep, the shame of behaving in so childish and unseemly a fashion helped to increase my distress. What would her Majesty and Lady Halifax think? This interview had been solicited and granted as an especial favour; and now,

instead of pleading my cause with all the earnest eloquence at my command, I was weeping my heart out at the Queen's feet, unable to articulate a single word.

Presently I became aware of the touch of a kindly hand upon my head, and a sweet voice (not Lady Halifax's) asked gently,—

“Tell me, my child, what is your trouble? Why do you weep so bitterly?”

“O madam, my husband! my husband!” I sobbed, articulating the words with extreme difficulty, and not daring to raise my face.

“I have been hearing somewhat of your husband,” came those musical tones again. “You have been long wedded for your years, if what I have heard be true. And so you love your husband, child, even though you have been so long parted from him?”

The tone in which these words were spoken gave me courage to raise my face, although I could not check the flow of tears that still coursed down it.

“Ah, madam, I have loved him always—ever. We lived as children together. He was dearer than all save my mother; and when they united us in wedlock, we vowed to be ever constant, ever true, not at the altar only, but again and again to each other during the days that followed ere we parted. Methinks, madam, you have heard our story—how we were

parted, how they have tried to separate us ; but we have ever been faithful each to the other and our marriage-vow, madam—~~the~~ gracious Majesty. Another parting threatens us—a parting that must ever sunder us till we meet in the land where they can never part us more. Ah, madam, it is for that cause I venture to come before you to-day. A word from you, and my dear, dear husband will be given back as from the dead, and we shall be free from the load of care that weighs us down as to the grave. Ah, madam, he is no traitor ; he is a true and loyal servant. He has harboured no thought of treason. His worst offence was that he visited his Majesty, your father, but not on any errand save that of paying a tribute of private respect. For that shall his head be in danger ? Ah, madam, think me not over-bold when I dare thus to plead for pardon. I plead for life for him—for me—for our love that has already borne so much and yet has never faltered. Gracious lady, it is for no traitor I plead, but for one who has already suffered hardship almost worse than death, and that for no crime save an error of judgment and the rashness of inexperience. Pardon my husband, gracious sovereign, pardon him I pray you ; and I will pledge my life that you and yours shall never regret the boon. Ah, could you but read his heart and mine, I feel assured you would not say me nay. Ah, madam, madam ! ” and then the tears

forced their way again, and I broke down, sobbing uncontrollably.

The Queen then spoke in a low tone to Lady Halifax—spoke in a fashion as if she were somewhat puzzled and perplexed. I did not hear what passed, but in a few minutes I felt myself raised up by Lady Halifax, and placed in a low chair at the Queen's side, and she said in a low voice,—

“Her Majesty is not aware that you have already met your husband. She had heard your early history, and she knows his present peril from the warrant issued; but I judged it better that she should hear the latter part of the story from your own lips. Do not be afraid to tell all. Speak out bravely as you have done already. She is willing to listen; you must be brave to speak.”

I had by that time in part conquered my extreme emotion, and had also taken courage from the kindness already received. I wiped away my tears, and looking at the Queen saw that her eyes too were moist; and when she said quite kindly and gently, “That is well, my child; now let me hear all,” I plucked up heart of grace and told her the whole story of my sojourn at my uncle's house, our unexpected finding of Rupert, and his subsequent escape, as freely and frankly as I had done a few days before to Lady Halifax. Only as I reached the end of my

story I could no longer keep the seat upon which I had been placed ; I sank once more upon my knees, and with tears flowing afresh besought her Majesty's clemency for him and me, and pardon for one who stood in sore peril of his life.

" Well, pretty child, it seems as if his offence has scarce merited such hard measure as has already been meted out to him ; and he has an eloquent advocate to plead his cause. You are a wise maiden to come to me to plead a wife's cause on behalf of an absent husband. You have read Shakespeare to some purpose, and know how 'one touch of nature makes the whole world kin.' I would see this good servant of yours who has acted so faithful a part. These are days that make us prize fidelity as a rare virtue ;" and the Queen struck a little bell, and gave some orders to a page who answered the summons.

I was hardly able to hear what passed when Gowrie was summoned for a few minutes to the royal presence ; and hardly had she gone, before a gentleman who looked like a secretary or counsellor was ushered in, and in his hand he bore a parchment which he presented to the Queen.

" It is worded in accordance with your Majesty's instructions," he said with a low bow ; and the Queen cast her eyes over it and made a sign of assent.

" A pen," she said briefly ; and when one was handed

to her, she affixed her royal signature to the document. Then dismissing the man with a gesture, she turned and held out the paper to me.

“There, my child, accept it as a wedding-gift from your Queen ; and when your husband is sufficiently recovered, let him appear at court to kiss my hand. I shall look to Sir Rupert Melville for the future as to a faithful servant of the King’s.”

“Madam, he will not disappoint you,” was what I tried to say, but I could not get out the words. I could only throw myself again at the Queen’s feet and kiss the hem of the robes she wore.

Then she raised me, kissed me on the brow, and Lady Halifax led me gently away, unable after all that had been done to speak a single word of thanks.

How we got away from the palace, or what my kind friend said to me, I cannot now remember. The next thing that I clearly recollect was mounting the stairs to Rupert’s attic, about six o’clock that evening, to find Oliver and Arthur with him, both having dropped in upon him after their day’s work was done.

I did not speak ; I just put the paper into his hands, and turned away to the window, biting my lips to keep back the foolish tears that to-day seemed uncontrollable.

It was Oliver who first grasped the contents of the paper: a free pardon for Sir Rupert Melville, for any real or alleged acts of treason or disloyalty committed before the date of the paper; followed by a clause confirming him in the possession of all his ancestral property and revenues, which there had been some endeavour of late to disturb.

And to this important document was affixed the royal signature, which, in the absence of the King, was of the same value as the joint mandate of both. Rupert Melville was a free man, free to come and go as he would; in no danger from secret or open foe. Our long day of trial and probation was over at last.

The three men came crowding round me to hear my story, and a very poor business I made of telling it, I am afraid; but Gowrie supplemented my narrative by an exhaustive one of her own, and I think the tale was in the end made pretty clear to all. Oliver and Arthur departed quickly, and Gowrie descended to the lower rooms. Rupert and I were alone together, having hardly exchanged a word all this time, though my dear love's eyes had been eloquent enough.

Then, howeyer, he came forward and folded me in his arms. For a long time we stood silent thus; I do not think either of us could find words or voice.

“My wife, my own true, brave, loyal wife!” he said at last in a deep tremulous voice that thrilled me

through and through. "Ah, my dearest, best, and truest one, what do I not owe to you—health, liberty, life itself? Maud, my sweetest wife, how can I ever repay the debt I owe you?"

"You do not owe me anything, my husband, because you *are* my husband, and I belong to you, as you belong to me. It did not need my mother's teaching; our hearts told it us all through. We were joined together in God's sight long ago; and He has guarded and guided our paths, and not let men put us asunder, for in His holy sight we are one."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE royal pardon once obtained, Rupert Melville was at liberty to proclaim himself and show himself abroad when and how he pleased ; and yet for full six weeks he and his young wife kept their happy secret to themselves, and bound over their accomplices and benefactors to secrecy. It seemed as if, after the long strain that had been laid upon them, they were half afraid of encountering the tumult of astonishment, admiration, or criticism that might be lavished upon them ; as if they craved the brief period of solitude and quietness that is now generally admitted as desirable for a newly-married pair. Practically, that was the situation of Sir Rupert and his young wife, and they longed to enjoy each other's society for a short space in uninterrupted harmony, before mixing again in the gay world without.

This matter was speedily arranged by Oliver. He took a little house in his own name in the then rustic

and secluded village of Islington, and asked the sanction of kind Mr. and Mrs. Fells for a six weeks' visit there from his sister. No one was surprised at this move on his part. Oliver had been somewhat shaken since his accident, and was apparently very dependent upon Maud's society ; and the girl appeared to have felt her long residence in London, and to stand in need of country air. Her own home was still closed to her—indeed, Cottingham and his wife were away, and her sisters were passing the time of their absence at Bath with their father, who had been recommended to try the waters for his health—and Oliver's plan seemed the best that could be devised. No objection of any kind was raised. Her brother came and fetched her and her faithful attendant away, and the same evening saw her welcomed by her husband to the humble yet happy home that was the first of their united married life.

And in the sweet seclusion of that rustic place six weeks of unalloyed happiness sped by, without one cloud to dim the brightness of the summer sky. Hand in hand, like two happy children, the young husband and wife would wander through the winding lanes or gather flowers in the green meadows, where the waving grass was waiting the mower's scythe. They lived again their childhood days, yet with a far deeper sense of their sweetness and peace than any

child could understand. The beauty of the waving woods, the summer hedgerows, the laughing brooks, the ever-changing sky, struck upon the senses of the released captive with an almost intoxicating sense of happiness and wonder. And even to Maud nature spoke in a language sweet and new. She said in her heart that she had never known how exquisite the face of the great Mother could be until she had passed a whole year amid the sights and sounds of a great city, enclosed behind and amid a wilderness of brick walls.

But the deepest happiness and sweetness of all was the ceaseless earnest love that had established itself in the hearts of the young couple, whose married life had known such strange vicissitudes. To be with one another, to feel that they were indeed united, that no danger menaced their future, no dread of separation hung over their heads—that was the crown and seal of their happiness, that was the overpowering joy that brought back health and strength to the shattered frame so sorely tried in the past, and gave to the young wife that rich and exquisite beauty that in days to come won for her the *sobriquet* of “Star of the Court.”

That happiness is the best of medicines is a trite saying enough, but none the less a very true one. Before Rupert had been a fortnight in this quiet

retreat he looked another being, and gladly accepted Oliver's offer of sending down horses for him and his wife to extend their rambles beyond the limits of a walk.

The pleasure of feeling himself again in the saddle gave a new impetus to his recovery, and the gentle rides he took with his wife did him more good than any tonic in the whole pharmacopœia. By the time June was reaching its meridian, Sir Rupert Melville was entirely restored to his old vigour and health, and it began to dawn both upon him and his wife that the time had come when it would be advisable to drop their present *incognito* (they were known in the village as Mr. and Mrs. Mackenzie), and appear at court, as desired by the Queen, and take up their true position in the eyes of the world. Rupert's property required attention, and he was well enough now to contemplate, without any shrinking, the task of putting his affairs in order. Oliver, when consulted, advised a move to London in the first instance, and himself engaged a handsome suite of rooms near to St. James's Park on behalf of Sir Rupert and Lady Maud Melville.

It was with strange feelings that the baronet and his wife entered their new habitation, and found themselves once more waited on by obsequious and well-trained servants. They received a kind message

from Lady Halifax, almost the first thing on their arrival, together with an intimation that they would be expected to attend a reception given by the Queen three days later at Kensington Palace. At present hardly anything was known respecting Sir Rupert Melville. His case had attracted no public notice, and the matter of the warrant against him, or the pardon subsequently granted, was alike unknown to more than a few persons. The Queen continued to make kindly inquiries after the young couple, and her favour was assured. When they had once appeared at court, and received public marks of her favour, they might be very certain that even Cottingham and his wife would receive Rupert gladly. Indeed, as he proved to be no Jacobite, but ready to serve loyally the Protestant King and Queen, there was no ground for any further hostility.

Arthur Fells was the first visitor to pay his respects in person.

"My father and mother know nothing of all this, Maud," he said. "They are not in the way of hearing any court gossip, and for all they know you are still keeping house for Oliver at Islington. I thought they would hear your story better from your lips than from mine, and so I have left it for you to tell, when you introduce your husband."

"Must I tell about the escape too?" asked Maud.

"No, I think not," answered Arthur, who had evidently thought the matter carefully out beforehand. "I think, at least so long as my father occupies his official position at Newgate, it will be better for him to be kept in ignorance of that one episode. It is not that he would resent what you and all of us conspired to do—in his heart he would rejoice—but it would add to his anxieties, and he might feel it his duty to report the occurrence to the sheriffs, and they might in turn forbid any visits of Mary to the prisoners. That would greatly distress my Mary, for she is resolved that the work of charity begun by you shall not be altogether discontinued. We are to live very near to Newgate when we are married, and her mother will live with us, and these two sweet saints propose carrying on as far as may be the work you have begun. My father raises no objection, but he might feel it his duty to do so did he know that one of his captives was spirited away by sisters of mercy. For the present let nothing be known of the identity between Robert Moore and Rupert Melville. The former is safely consigned to the grave; there let him rest. In after years, when my father is no longer fettered by official duties, we will amuse him with the recital of the clever trick we all played him, and heartily he will enjoy the jest. But for the present our secret had best remain with us."

"I understand. We will be cautious; but what, then, shall we say of Rupert?"

"Say what is true: that you knew two months ago that he was in hiding in London for fear of the warrant of arrest out against him; tell them how you sought the Queen and obtained the royal pardon; and subsequently how, by Oliver's assistance, you joined your husband in the country and passed some happy weeks together before announcing yourselves publicly. Tell them all that: it will completely satisfy them; and some day, when no harm can come of it, we will tell them all the rest."

That same afternoon, as the shadows were beginning to lengthen, Sir Rupert Melville and his wife approached the gloomy pile of Newgate. Maud felt that a tremor passed through her husband's frame as they stood before the ill-omened portal, and looking up into his face, she saw that it was pale and set.

"Rupert!" she said softly.

He looked down and smiled very tenderly.

"I was thinking of the last time I approached this spot, and all that followed," he said. "But for you, sweetheart, I should be lying now where the supposed body of Robert Moore is resting. How can I thank you for all you have done? What do I not owe to the constancy and courage of my wife?"

Mrs. Fells was alone in her pleasant withdrawing-

room, as Maud entered followed by her husband. She ran forward with a little cry of pleasure, and was at once folded in her aunt's arms, and whilst their heads were in such close proximity she found words in which to whisper,—

“Dear Aunt Fells, I have come to tell you something. I have found my husband—I have brought Rupert to see you.”

Mrs. Fells looked up in astonishment. Rupert had been keeping in the shadowy background so far, and she had fancied that it was Oliver who had accompanied his sister. Now she rose to her feet, and still holding Maud close to her side, gazed in the face of the stranger, many conflicting emotions struggling for mastery in her face.

“Dear aunt, it is Rupert—my husband.”

“Come in person to thank you for all your tender kindness and consideration to my dear wife in her very harassing and difficult position,” added Rupert in his serious, courtly manner—a manner in which dignity and gentleness were very happily blended. “We owe very much to you, Mrs. Fells, and to your excellent husband, and I could not tarry longer without coming in person to tender my thanks.”

“You are welcome, indeed, young sir—more welcome than my poor words can tell. But—forgive me if I intrude—is it safe for you to be abroad thus openly?

I have been told that there is danger abroad respecting you. We have wept for you as one dead—or at least dead to us and to all that constitutes life. I trust—I trust you are running no risk in thus showing yourself. I am so bewildered I know not how to welcome you aright."

Maud interrupted her with a kiss and a low laugh of happiness, whilst Rupert made answer,—

"Thanks to the sweet offices of my wife, that won for me a free pardon from our gracious sovereign lady the Queen, I am in no danger or peril. I am a free man, free to come and go at will, in no fear of evil from friend or foe. You are perplexed, good madam, and not without cause; but the history can soon be told. My wife heard of me in hiding. My health was impaired, my future and my liberty imperilled. I was about to try to fly the country and seek to win the King's favour and pardon by attachment to his cause abroad; but whilst I waited for health to do this, my Maud sought and obtained audience of the Queen, and gained me all I needed. Our sweet secret we both desired to keep a little longer, and Oliver, who was in our confidence throughout, devised the plan of sending us to Islington for a brief space till my health was re-established, and I could appear in public with my wife. Two days ago we gave up our silvan solitude and returned to

London ; and no time do we lose in coming to make known to you our present happiness, and to thank you for all you have done for us in the past. We shall ever look on you and yours as our best and truest friends."

This romantic story caused, as may be guessed, great excitement in that household. Mr. Fells was summoned with all possible speed, and was warm in his congratulations, and delighted with the courage and devotion of his "little maid," in actually facing royalty itself on behalf of an almost unknown husband. He was acute enough to see that some details of the story were being kept back ; but he was too prudent and far too well versed in the peculiar perils of the time to press for information not voluntarily accorded, or even to wish to hear more than the narrator judged it best to tell. He asked Rupert no awkward questions as to how his time had been spent during the greater part of the past year, and even turned the conversation more than once when his wife would have pressed for information on this point. He accepted the present aspect of affairs with unquestioning good faith, and had no disposition to pry behind the scenes.

Once at supper he exclaimed, almost involuntarily, in watching Rupert's countenance,—

" It seems to me, good nephew, that your face is strangely familiar. I could have sworn I had seen you before."

Rupert looked across at him and laughed.

"You must see such tens and hundreds of faces every day of your life that it is no great marvel if I resemble some amongst that crowd."

"Like enough! like enough!" answered Mr. Fells quickly and easily, and for a while he was somewhat silent, glancing from time to time at Rupert with rather keen scrutiny, and anon watching Maud's animated countenance with something of a humorous twinkle in his eye. Arthur observed this, and wondered if, perhaps, some dim perception of the truth were growing in his mind; but he could form no conclusion on this point, for his father spoke no syllable to him upon the subject, and only to his wife did he remark late that night,—

"Young folks always will be young folks, and one loves them all the better for their courage and their devotion. Bolts and bars are fine institutions, but the old song is right after all, 'Love will find out the way.' Ah me! good wife, one can only be young once. God bless them both, and give them happy days! He is a fine young fellow, and she a pearl amongst women. They deserve each other and their happiness. Pray Heaven they may live to enjoy it!"

And Mrs. Fells said a hearty "Amen," albeit she had not quite understood the entire purport of her husband's words.

Viscount Cottingham and his wife returned from a sojourn in the ancient city of Winchester only a single day before they were summoned to attend a reception of the Queen's at Kensington Palace. No word had reached them as yet concerning Rupert's fate. They began to feel confident of his death, and were taking counsel somewhat eagerly together as to the possibility of securing his estates to Maud, and at the same time of inducing the young widow to marry again. Of course she would wish certain information respecting her husband's death, and that might be very difficult to obtain. Maud had proved herself peculiarly resolute and obstinate in the matter of her future and the disposal of her hand. It was to be hoped that her patience and constancy, misplaced as they were, would be worn out in time, and that she would soon be willing to listen to reason. When Oliver dropped in towards evening to welcome his brother and sister-in-law back, they soon appealed to him for news of Maud, and for an expression of his opinion respecting her future conduct.

Oliver, however, as was his way, declined to commit himself.

"You will see her to-morrow yourself, and can speak to her about it. She will be at the Queen's reception."

"Maud at the court! How comes that about?"

asked Esther with some warmth. "I have never presented her; though I always intended to do so when she showed herself amenable to authority."

"My Lady Halifax has taken that office upon herself," answered Oliver in his usual indifferent fashion. "Maud is in high favour with the marquis and his wife, and they say her Majesty received her very graciously. Our sister, Cottingham, is growing into rare beauty. She will be one of the fairest women present to-morrow, or I greatly mistake me."

Cottingham and his wife hardly knew whether or not to be glad at this intelligence—to augur well from it or the reverse. The fact that Maud allowed herself to be taken up by Lady Halifax and presented at court implied a weariness of her present surroundings and a wish to enter again the sphere to which her rank entitled her. But then, if she made powerful friends of her own, she might be less amenable to the authority of a brother; and as she was now of age, no actual compulsion could be used to enforce obedience. They must wait and watch, and see how matters were tending. On the whole, they augured favourably from what they had heard.

Kensington Palace was ablaze with lights and with flowers, albeit the daylight had by no means departed, when the gay crowd of courtiers and richly-dressed dames swept into the Queen's reception-rooms, which

were soon crowded with the brilliant assemblage invited to attend.

Viscount Cottingham and his wife had paid their addresses to their sovereign, and were passing the time in seeking out their friends and exchanging greetings with them, when a message reached them that caused them some surprise. The Queen, it was said, desired their presence in one of the smallest of the reception-rooms, where she was wont sometimes, when fatigued, to retire, or to cause to be brought to her any statesman or other person with whom, for public or private reasons, she desired a brief interview. Cottingham, however, had never been thus summoned before ; and the fact that the presence of his wife was also solicited added to his surprise. Nevertheless, both were flattered by this mark of favour, and followed the attendant willingly enough.

Although the evening was now somewhat far advanced, they had seen nothing of Maud ; but though they had obtained glimpses from time to time of Lady Halifax and the Marquis, they had not come within speaking distance, nor did Maud appear to be with them. Nothing of this, however, occupied their thoughts as they approached the royal presence ; and when they were ushered into the room they found the Queen almost alone, though a few ladies and gentlemen of the court stood grouped in the background.

Although the conduct of this Queen has often been criticised by her biographers as something too cold and haughty, and although her nature was certainly not predisposed to warmth or friendliness of feeling towards those about her, yet she possessed undoubtedly deep feelings, all the deeper for being but rarely moved ; and when once her affection, solicitude, or interest had been fairly aroused, she could show herself capable of great kindness and consideration. Moreover, no one could be more fascinating and agreeable in manner than Mary when she chose to exert herself ; and on this occasion she appeared to be in her most gracious mood.

“ My Lord Cottingham,” she said, as he approached and bent the knee before her, “ we have ever been aware of your great loyalty to our person and our cause, and it has therefore pleased us to be the one to impart to you a piece of intelligence that cannot but be joyous to you. A heavy cloud has for long been hanging over one bound to you by close ties of affection, and your very loyalty has obliged you at times to take her contrary part and bring sorrow upon her when you would have wished to bestow joy. We have brought you into our presence to-day to tell you that by the courage and devotion of a young wife the danger has been all averted, the clouds driven away ; and to witness the presentation to you of a brother-in-

law, of whom we ourselves think very highly, one who seems to us in all ways worthy of the sweet and noble wife it has been his good fortune to win. In boyhood, as we have heard, you knew each other ; but time has worked great changes. It seems to us a pleasant and grateful office to introduce afresh two such loyal servants of the throne as Lord Cottingham and Sir Rupert Melville."

And at a sign from the Queen an inner door was thrown open, and Rupert led his fair young wife into the presence of the Queen.

Cottingham was of all things a courtier, and he was too well trained in court etiquette to be betrayed into anything like an ungraceful surprise, still less to expose himself by any appearance of chagrin. He embraced his sister warmly, he pressed Rupert's hand with every appearance of good-will, and listened with great cordiality to as much of the story as was desirable at that moment to reveal. Nor was his demeanour altogether hypocritical, for in the main his objection to Rupert had been on political grounds, and the fact that he now stood high in the Queen's favour at once obliterated all such objections. And despite a consciousness of some personal antipathy, the result of a long-fostered boyish jealousy and prejudice, he was quite aware that the only thing now was to make friends with the best grace possible and forget all old scores.

"Ah, gracious madam, we owe it all to you," said Maud, lingering behind for a moment after the audience was over, and kneeling once more to kiss the sovereign's hand. "How can we thank you for all your great goodness to us? May God reward you, for none else can but He!"

The Queen bent her stately head, and pressed one more kiss upon the young wife's brow.

"God bless you, my child, and give you grace to be true to Him, true to your husband, and true to your King. Not to me do you owe your present happiness, but to your own deep love and devotion that touched a cold heart; a heart that can and does respond, however, to a tale of wifely love. My husband is absent from me, exposed to peril and danger. In the midst of your happiness spare a prayer for his safe return, as I spared thought and care for you in your hour of anxious fear. And now, my child, farewell. We shall meet again without doubt, and I shall reap my reward in your husband's loyalty and love to the cause we have at heart."

With eyes swimming in tears Maud left her sovereign's presence. She never forgot in her future happiness her deep love and gratitude towards her Queen, and none wept with more true sorrow for her untimely and early death.

Sir Rupert Melville, a man of some considerable

wealth and importance, high in the royal favour, and with a history of extraordinary romance attaching to him, became at once an important personage wherever he went. He was entirely reconciled to his wife's family, and the hostility and ill-will of the past were ignored, by common consent, as if they never had been.

He returned shortly after his presentation at court to his ancestral manor, where for many months he was busily occupied in putting his affairs in order. As for his wife, she was as happy as the day was long. The dark past seemed to her as an evil dream. She could hardly believe that the long, long separation had ever been a reality. It felt to her as if she and Rupert had ever been living in that dim, sweet old house, around which her earliest memories and associations seemed to cling. Doubtless the present was infinitely sweeter for the dark, tear-stained pages of the past; but it was often hard for the happy young wife to realize how dark those pages had been—especially for him who had suffered so much and so long.

Great cordiality existed between the Priory and the Manor, as indeed was but natural to all concerned. Lord Wakefield seemed to rouse himself from his state of listless apathy when there was a Melville baronet again at the old place, and he was soon as much at home in his son-in-law's house as in his own.

And when a little Charles was one day put into his arms by the proud young father to receive its grand-sire's blessing, the old man seemed to take out a "new lease of life," as we call it in these days, and to recover, in a fashion, in pride of his grandson, the old interest in life that since his wife's death had almost forsaken him.

Oliver, who showed no disposition to enter the married state, was ever a welcome visitor at the Manor, the more so as he was a medium of communication between its inmates and their kinsfolk the Fells, with whom they ever retained most cordial relations.

"How happy we all are," Maud would sometimes say at these family gatherings in her married home; and whilst her husband caressed her soft hair, and the old father stooped to kiss the little boy, Oliver would reply in his dry fashion,—

"Very true, my lady, though we must plead guilty to a fair share of vicissitudes of life; but it seems to me that we owe this happy ending to our troubles to that romantic Melville marriage of yours."

THE END.

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